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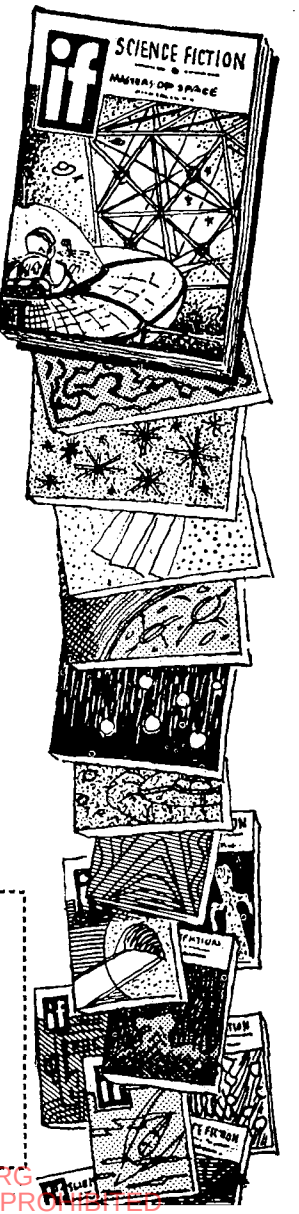

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HONOR FOR PROPHETS

A DISCONCERTING thing has happened to science-fiction writers recently. Their opinions are being sought, not by other science-fiction writers or by readers, but by representatives of the public at large.

The causes of this phenomenon go back to that proud boast of science fiction, its ability to foresee the future and thus to give its devotees inside information on the as yet unrevealed shape of tomorrow. Heaven knows, we can all use such information. As H. G. Wells said shortly before he died, "A strange queerness is coming into life." Life seems increasingly complex, and its prospects seem increasingly uncertain. As science fiction predicted the submarine, the atomic bomb, television,

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rocket travel through space and endless other developments — and it did predict these things, there is no doubt of it — it would appear to be a good bet to go to science fiction again for a glimpse of what is coming next in this perplexing world we live in.

So more and more the "mainstream" world is knocking on the door of science-fiction writers for tips on tomorrow. Hardly a writer is so secluded or so reticent as to avoid being summoned before his local women's club or P.T.A., church group or civic association. Among the mass media *Life* commissions essays from Ray Bradbury. *Playboy* calls together a panel of a dozen writers; *Newsweek* interviews a dozen more for a sidebar on its "space age" issue. The newspapers have not neglected us, and radio and television shows have given us air time in nearly every country.

What disconcerts a science-fiction writer about this is that it means that the world is interested in his opinions — a world which, until the other day, could not have cared less. The most disturbing aspect is that he has usually considered his guesses on the scientific developments of tomorrow to be the least part of his art. He has cared more for what he could say about the effect of the future's gadgetry on people than about the gadgets themselves: He says not, "This is what will happen," but, "This is what will happen *if* — "

IT IS GOOD to have one's opinions solicited, but the gilt cracks off the gingerbread when it is the wrong opinions that are asked.

The record of science-fiction writers on "hard" predictions of fact is not really very good. (Perhaps it is a little better than the record for statesmen or for scientists.) It is true that atomic power was a commonplace of science fiction long before Hiroshima. It is also true that this atomic power was generated in queerly implausible ways, and showed itself in improbable forms. Richard Ballinger Seaton, for instance, passed a D-cell current through a plated copper bar in E. E. Smith's *Skylark of Space,* and the "atomic power" he liberated was a sort kinetic energy without charged particles or heat.

There were right guesses, of course. Statistically there had to be; one right guess out of a hundred or a thousand wrong ones. This is not in itself an impressive record. Even a broken clock is right twice a day.

Still, there is something here that repays study.

In his book, *The Next Million Years,* Charles Galton Darwin makes the claim that he is able

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to describe accurately what the world will be like in 1,001,963 A.D., although he admits that this is impossible for a hundred-year forecast, or even for a forecast of a single year. Is this a contradiction? No, says Darwin, for over the span of a million years all the random variables will cancel out. We need not concern ourselves with specific events, but can trace out general patterns and proceed from causes to effects.

In something like this sense science-fiction stories can claim a sort of insight on the future. Jules Verne failed the test of inventing the sonar-fused torpedo or the shnorkel. But he passed on broad outlines: he knew that submarines could kill unprotected shipping as well as Admiral Doenitz ever learned. E. E. Smith's plated copper warheads indicated the magnitudes of nuclear explosions as convincingly as anything on Yucca Flats — in 1928! Lester del Rey's *Nerves* anticipated the heroic story of Louis Slotin in its essentials. The story in both cases was a man offering his life to avert a nuclear explosion. In the fiction it involved great masses of equipment and teams of men, taking hours; in the event only one man was involved and it was over as soon as it began: Slotin knocked the reacting masses of uranium apart, and died of exposure.

These are not hard predictions. They are insights into possible environments and stresses which did not exist at the time of writing. A science-fiction story is not a scratch-sheet for handicapping tomorrow's horse races — or tomorrow's nuclear arms races. It can only show what kind of world we may live in — and at that, it gives us one choice out of endless alternatives.

WE LIKE things made easy and quick, and so we read the boiled-down newsletter instead of the thick morning paper; we watch the five-minute sports roundup instead of sitting in the bleachers on a summer afternon. But there are some things that do not capsulize. There is not much market for a synopsis of a sonnet.

By all means let us turn to science-fiction writers for a look at the future. But they should not be consulted as oracles; they should be consulted as science-fiction writers, by reading their stories.

Otherwise we miss the pleasure and fun of what they have to say, and much of its meaning as well.

After all — if what science-fiction writers have to say about the future could have been written in any other way, they would have written it that way to begin with!

—THE EDITOR

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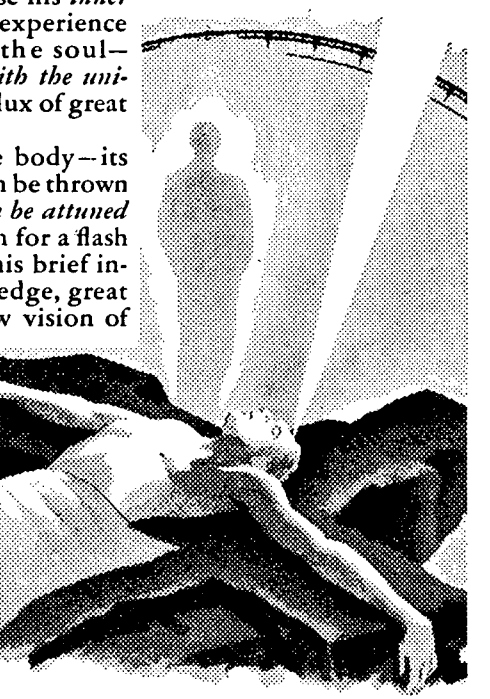

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HOME from the SHORE

Out of the sea came Man's first air-breathing ancestors. Back to the sea Mankind may some day go!

By GORDON R. DICKSON

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

I

WELL, IT WAS about four in the afternoon. You know how it is that time of day at Savannah Stand, with most of the day-charter flyers back in the ranks. All the hanging around and talking and the smell of cigarette smoke on the air, and the water stains drying back to the pale color of the concrete from the flyers that have just been washed down. You know what a good time of day that is.

Well, it was maybe a few minutes after four. Everybody was kidding about how the *Nu-Ark* was just about ready to split

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apart in the air and her pilot never know the difference. We were talking like that when somebody spotted a fare down at the far end of the ranks. He came up along the line, a big young tourist in a flower-patterned thousand-islands shirt hanging outside his pants, walking across the water stains already fading out like the cigarette smoke in the sun and looking into faces under the shadows of the ducted fans as he passed. He came on down and stopped at last by the *Nu-Ark* and hired her. And they took off east out over the ocean.

"One to five, in beers," said the pilot of the *Squarefish* as we watched them shrink down in the

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tion with a narrow doorway in it just back of the pilot seat. The whole flyer had a light flat-tasting stink of lubricating oil from the fans all through it. It vibrated to the hard working of the fans so that anything touched sent a quiver from the finger ends up to the elbow. Up front of the partition there was just room for the

they had come, the shoreline where the land ended and the ocean began was sharp and as definite as if someone had drawn it in sand-colored ink. To his right and northeast, from this height the sea was blue-gray, smoke-colored, corrugated and unmoving, stretching miles without end to the horizon, and lost

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there. There was no doubt about the shoreline. But the distant horizon line where ocean met sky was no line at all. The still, blue-gray waters lifted to the far emptiness until they were lost in it. No one could have said for sure where the one ended and the other began.

THE SKY, on the other hand, that went to meet the sea, was a pale thin blue with only a small handful of white clouds about thirty miles off and at twenty thousand feet. Right from the moment of takeoff, the passenger had seen that the pilot of the *Nu-Ark* never looked at the clouds. He kept his eyes only on the indefinite horizon. Glancing over now, the passenger saw by the back of a head showing above the headrest of the pilotseat that the pilot was still at it. It looked to the passenger as if the pilot was so used to the sky that he no longer noticed it. He did not notice the vibration, the faltering of his fans or the stink of oil. Likewise, he seemed used to the look of the sea. But the far-off and strange part of things that was the horizon drew all the attention of his eyes.

They were brown, his eyes, the passenger remembered. A little bloodshot. Set in a middle-aged tropical face tanned and thickened into squint lines around the corners of the eyes. Just then the pilot spoke, without turning.

"Keep straight on out?" he said.

The passenger went tight at the sound of the voice, jerking his eyes back to the pilotseat. But the black, straight hair of the pilot showed unmoving against the tan imitation leather. The passenger hooked a thumb into the neck opening of his bright-printed sports shirt. With one quick downward jerk of the thumb he unsealed the closure and the shirt fell open.

"Straight on out," he said. He shrugged off the shirt and reached for the belt closure of his green slacks. "Another four or five minutes, this heading."

"Ten, twelve miles," said the pilot. "All right."

The black-haired portion of his head that was showing tilted forward. The passenger could see him finally leaning toward the sea. Looking, no doubt, for a vee of wake, a squat triangle of sail, some dark boat-shape.

"Who do you think's out here now — " he began.

He had started turning his head to look back as he spoke. As his eyes came around to see the passenger undressing, he moved with unexpected quickness, letting go of the control bar and swinging himself and his pilot seat all the way around.

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The flyer shuddered briefly as it went into autopilot. The passenger ripped off his slacks and stood up straight in only khaki-colored shorts. They looked at each other.

THE LOOK on the pilot's face had not changed. But now the passenger saw the brown eyes come to sharp focus on him. He stood balanced and wait.

The only thing he was afraid of now was that the pilot would not look closely enough. He was afraid the pilot might see only a big young man in his early twenties. A young man with a strong-boned body muscled like a wrestler, but with a square, open and too easy-going sort of face. Then he saw the pilot's eyes flicker to the three blue dots tattooed on his bare right collarbone, and after that drop to the third finger of his right hand which showed a ring of untanned white about its base. The eyes came back up to his face then. When he saw their expression had still not changed, he knew that that one fear, at least, he could forget.

"I guess," said the pilot, "you know who's out there after all."

"That's right," he said. He continued to stand, leaving the next move up to the pilot. Six inches from the pilot's still left hand was the small, closed door of a map compartment. In there would probably be a knife or gun. The pilot himself was big-boned and thick-bodied. The years had put a scar above one eyebrow and broken and enlarged three knuckles on his right hand. These were things that had caused the pilot to be picked by him for this taxi-job in the first place. He had trusted a man like the pilot of the *Nu-Ark* not to go off half-cocked.

"So you seen a space bat," said the pilot now, still watching him. The name came out sounding odd in the southern accent; but for a moment it hit home and the pilot blurred before his eyes as tears jumped in them. He blinked quickly; but the pilot had not moved. Once again he remembered how slow land people were to cry. The pilot would not have been figuring that advantage.

"We all did," he said.

"Yeh," said the pilot. "Your picture was on the news. Johnny Joya, aren't you?"

"That's right," he said.

"Ringleader, weren't you?"

"No," said Johnny. "There's no ringleaders with us."

"News said so."

"No."

"Well, they did."

"They don't know."

The pilot shrugged. He sat still for a second.

"All right," he said. "They still

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got a reward out for you bigger than on any the rest of the Cadets."

THEY HELD still for another little moment, watching each other. The flyer bored on through the air, automatically holding its course. Johnny stood balanced. He was thinking that he had picked this pilot because the man was like him. It might be they were too much alike. It might be that the pilot had too much pride to let himself be forced, in spite of the squint lines and broken knuckles and knowing now what his chances would be with someone like Johnny. If it was that, the pilot would need some excuse, or reason.

Easily, not taking his eyes off the pilot, Johnny reached down and picked up his slack. From one pocket he searched out something small, circular and hard. Holding it outstretched in his fingers, he took two steps forward and offered it to the pilot.

"Souvenir," he said.

The pilot looked down at it. It was a steel ring with a crest on it showing what looked like a mailed fist grasping at a star.

Two words—*ad astra*—were cut in under the crest.

"Souvenir," said Johnny again.

The pilot looked it over for a long second, then slowly reached out two of the fingers with the broken knuckles and tweezered it between the ends of them, out of Johnny's grasp. He turned it slowly over, first one way and then the other, looking at it.

He said, "Once I would've wanted one like that." He lifted his eyes to Johnny. "I don't understand. Nobody does."

"It looks that way to us, too," he answered, not moving. "We don't understand Landers."

"Yeah," said the pilot. He turned the ring again. "Well, you was the one that was there. You all go home, all you sea kids?"

"It's not our job," he said. "Fill your Space Academy with your own people."

"Yeah," said the pilot, almost to himself. Slowly he folded in the fingers holding the ring, until it was covered and hidden in the grasp of his fist. He put the fist in his pocket and when it came out again he no longer held the ring. "All right. Souvenir." He turned back to the controls. "How much on out?"

"About a mile now."

The pilot took hold of the control bar. The flyer dropped. The surface of the sea came up to meet them, becoming more blue and less gray as it approached. From high up it had looked fixed and unmoving, but now they could see there was motion to it. When they got close indeed, they

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could see how it was furrowed and all in action, so that no part of it was the same as any other, or stayed the same.

JOHNNY PUT one palm to the ceiling and pressed upward. He stood braced against the angle of their descent, looking past the bunched-up muscles of his forearms at the jacketed back of the pilot and the approaching sea.

"How can you tell?" asked the pilot, suddenly. "You know where we are now?"

"About eight-one, fifty west," said Johnny, "by about thirty-one, forty north."

The pilot glanced at his instruments.

"Right on," the pilot said. "Or almost. How?"

"Come to sea," he answered. "Your grandchildren'll have it." His eyes blurred suddenly again for a second. "Why the hell you think they wanted us for their Space Program?"

"No," said the pilot, not turning his head, "leave me out of it." A moment later he leaned toward the windscreen. "Something in the top of the water, there."

"That's it," said Johnny. The flyer dropped. It came down on the surface and began to rock and move with the ceaseless motion of the waves. The ducted fans were unexpectedly still. Their thrumming had given way to a strange silence broken by the slapping of the waves against the flyer's underbody and small creakings of metal.

"Well, look there!" said the pilot.

He leaned forward, staring out through the windscreen. The flyer had become surrounded by a gang of stunting dolphin and seal. A great, swollen balloon of a fish — a guasa — floated almost to the surface alongside the flyer and gaped at it with a mouth that opened like a lifting manhole cover. Johnny slipped full-eye contact lenses into place and stripped off the shorts. In only the lenses and an athletic supporter, he picked up the small sealed suitcase he had brought aboard and opened the side door of the flyer, just back of the partition on the right. The pilot turned his seat to watch.

"Here — " he said suddenly. He reached into his pocket, brought out the Academy ring and held it out to Johnny. Johnny stared at him. "Go ahead, take it. What the hell, it don't mean anything to me!" Slowly, Johnny took it, hesitated, and slid it back on his right third finger to carry it. "Good luck."

"All right," said Johnny. "Thanks." He turned and tossed the suitcase out the door. Sev-

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eral dolphins raced for it, the lead one taking it in his almost beakless mouth. He was larger and somewhat different from the others.

"You going very deep there?" asked the pilot as Johnny stepped down on to the top of the landing steps, whose base were in the waves.

"Twenty . . ." Johnny glanced at the gamboling sea-creatures. "No, only about fifteen fathoms."

The pilot looked from him to the dolphins and back again.

"Ninety feet," said the pilot.

Johnny went down a couple of steps and felt the soft warmth of the sun-warmed surface waters roll over his feet. He looked back at the pilot.

"Thanks again," he said. He hesitated and then held out his hand. The pilot got up from his seat, came to the flyer door and shook. In the grip of their hands, Johnny could feel the hard callouses of the man's palm.

"It's what you call Castle-Home, down there?" said the pilot as they let go.

"No," said Johnny. "It's Home." On the last word he felt his vocal cords tighten and he was suddenly in a hurry to be going. "Castle-Home's — something else."

He let go of the doorpost of the flyer and stepped down and out into the ever-moving waves.

II

THE ONES that had come up to meet him — the seals, the dolphins, the guasa — went down with him. He saw the color of the under-waters, green as light behind a leaf-shadowed window. And he spread his arms with the gesture of the first man who ever stood on a hilltop watching the easy soaring of the birds. He swam downward.

The salt water was cool and simple and complete around him, after all the chills and sweatings of the land. In the stillness he could feel the slow, strong beating of his own heart driving the salt blood throughout his body. He felt cleaned at last from the dust and dirt of the past four and a half years. He felt free at last from the prison of his clothing.

Down he swam, his heart surging slowly and strongly. Around him, a revolving circus act of underwater, free-flying aerialists leaped and danced — ponderous guasa, doe-eyed harp seals, bottle-nosed and common dolphins. And the one large Risso's dolphin, with the suitcase in his mouth, circling closest.

Johnny clicked fingernails and tongue at the Risso's dolphin. It was a message in the dolphin code that the Risso's knew well. *"Baldur . . . Baldur the Beauti-*

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ful . . ." The twelve-foot gray beast rolled almost against him in the water, offering the trailing reins of the harness.

He caught first one rein, then the other, and let himself be towed down, no longer pivot man to the group but a moving part of it.

Seconds later, there was light below them, brighter than the light from above. They were coming down into the open hub of a large number of apartments, mostly with transparent walls, sealed together into the shape of a wheel. People poured out of the apartments like birds from an aviary. They clustered around him, swept him down and pushed him through the magnetic iris of an entrance. His ears popped slightly and he came through, walking into a large, air-filled room surrounding a pool. The dolphins, the seals and the guasa broke water in the pool in the same second. People crowded in after him, swarmed around him, shouting and laughing.

In a second the room was overfull. There was no spare space. A tall, lean young man, Johnny's age, looking like Johnny, climbed up on a table holding a sort of curved, long-necked banjo. Sitting crosslegged, he flashed fingers over the strings, ringing out wild, shouting music. Voices caught up the tune. A song — one Johnny had never heard before — beat at the walls.

Hey, Johnny! Hey-a, Johnny!
Home, from the shore!
Hey-o, Johnny! Hey, Johnny!
To high land, go no more!

Long away, away, my Johnny!
Four long years and more!
Hey-o, Johnny! Hey, Johnny!
Go high land, no more!

They were all singing. They sang, shouting it, swaying together, holding together, laughing and crying at the same time. The tears ran down their clean faces.

Johnny felt the arms of those closest to him, hugging him. Those who could not reach to hold him, held each other. The song rose, chanted, wept. It would be one of his lean cousin's songs, made up for the occasion of his homecoming. He did not know the words. But as he was handed on, slowly from the arms of one relative or friend to the next, he was caught up, at last, in the music and sang with the rest of them.

HE FELT the tears running down his own cheeks, the easy tears of his childhood. There was a great feeling in the room. It was the *nous-nous* of his people, of The People, the People of the Sea in all their

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three generations. He was caught up with them in the moment now and sang and wept with them. They were moved together in this moment of his returning, as the oceans themselves were moved by the great currents that gave life and movement to their waters. The roadways of the seal, the dolphin, and now the roadways of his people. The Liman, the Kuroshio, the Humbolt Current. The Canary, the Gulf Stream in which they were now this moment drifting north. The Labrador.

For four years he had been without this feeling. But now he was Home.

Gradually the great we-feeling of the People in the room relaxed and settled down into a spirit of celebration. The song of his homecoming shifted to a humorous ballad — about an old man who had a harp seal, which wouldn't get out of his bed. Laughter crackled among them. Long-necked green pressure bottles and a variety of marinated tidbits of seafood were passed from hand to hand. The mood of all of them settled into cheerfulness, swung at last to attention on Johnny. Quiet welled up and spread around the pool, quenching other talk.

Sitting now on the table that his cousin Patrick with the banjo had vacated, he noticed their waiting suddenly. He had his arm around the shoulders of a round-breasted, brown-haired, slight girl who sat leaning against him on the table, her head in the hollow of his shoulder. He had been looking down at her without talking, trying to see what difference four years had made in her. He saw something, but he could not put his finger on just what it was. Like all the sea-people, she was free; although he wondered if the Landers had appreciated the difference between that, and their own legal ways, when they had set all the Cadets from the sea down as unmarried. But still, she was free; and he had not even been certain that he would find her still here with his family and friends' Group when he came back.

She sat up and moved aside now, to let him sit up. Her eyes glanced against his for a moment and once more he thought he saw a new difference between her now and the girl he remembered. But what it was still stayed hidden to him. He turned and looked out at the people. They were all quiet now, sitting on chairs or hassocks or cross-legged on the floor and looking at him.

"I SUPPOSE you've all heard it on the news," he said. "Only that it was something

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about the space bats," said the voice of Patrick beneath him. Johnny leaned forward and peered over the edge of the table. Patrick sat crosslegged there, the banjo upright between his knees with the long neck sloping over his shoulder, his head leaning against it with the edge pressing into his cheek. He winked up at Johnny. The wink was the same wink Johnny remembered, but it put creases in Patrick's lean face he had never seen there before. Without warning, Patrick's face looked as Johnny had seen it on the jacket of a tape of Patrick's Moho Symphony, in a music department ashore. At the time Johnny had thought the picture was a bad likeness.

He winked back and straightened up.

He said, "The space bats were the final straw. That's all, actually."

"Were they big, Johnny?"

It was a child's voice. Johnny looked and saw a boy seated cross-legged almost at the foot of the table, his eyes full open, his lips a little parted, all his upper body leaning forward. He was one who had evidently been born into the Joya Group since Johnny left. Johnny did not know his name.

"The one I saw would have weighed about six ounces down here on Earth." He spoke to the boy as he would have spoken to any of the rest, regardless of age. "But — it was a good quarter mile across."

The boy drew in so deep a breath his shoulders lifted. When he let it out again his whole body shuddered.

"A quar-ter *mile!*" he whispered.

"A quarter mile," said Johnny, remembering. "A quarter mile. Like a silver curtain waving in the current of an off-shore tide. That's how it looked to me."

"You helped catch it?" said Emil Joya, who was an uncle both to Johnny and his cousin Patrick with the banjo.

Johnny looked up.

"No," he said. "They took the senior class, which was mostly made up of us sea people, out beyond Mars to observe. We just watched." He hesitated a second. "They said it'd be something some of us would be doing some day. Part of a project to find out how the space bats make it between the stars, if they do. And how to duplicate the process."

"I don't quite understand," said Emil, his heavy gray brows frowning in his square rock of a face.

"The Space Project people think the space bats can give up a secret of a practical way to drive our own ships between the

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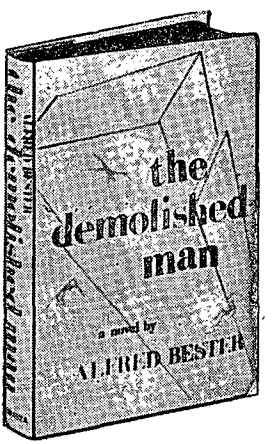

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stars at almost the speed of light."

"And you caught this one?" said Patrick, beneath the table.

"We watched" said Johnny. "It didn't try to escape. Men on space scooters walled it about with a net of charged particles. Then, all of a sudden, it seemed to understand. And it died."

"You killed it!" said the boy.

"Nobody killed it," said Johnny. "It died by itself. One minute it was there, waving like a silver curtain, and then the color started to go out of it. It fell in on itself. In just a moment it was nothing but a gray rag in the middle of the net." --

HE STOPPED talking. There was a second or two of silence in the small-Home crowded with sea people.

"And seeing that made you leave the Academy?" asked Patrick's voice.

"No," said Johnny. He drew a breath as deep as the boy had drawn. "After we came back from the observation cruise, we had to write reports. We wrote them separately; but afterwards we found we'd all written the same thing, we sea-Cadets. We wrote that the space bats killed themselves when they were captured because they couldn't bear being trapped." He breathed deeply again. "We wrote that it would never work this way. The bats would always die. The project was a blind alley."

"And then?" said Patrick.

"Then the CO commended us for the excellence of our reports." Johnny laughed a little. "And the next week we sea-Cadets were all scheduled for some more of their psychiatric explorative examinations — to determine the causes of our emotional reactions, as they called them, to the capture of the bat."

Once more no one said anything.

"It doesn't make sense," said Patrick at last.

"Not to us, it doesn't," said Johnny. "To a Lander it makes very good sense. They never wanted us sea people as people in the first place. When they asked our third generation men to enlist as Academy Cadets, they only wanted those parts of us they could make use of — our faster reaction times, our more stable emotional structure — our gift of reckoning location and distance and the new instincts living in the sea has wakened in us . . . " Johnny's voice trailed off. He thumped softly on the table by his knee with one knotted fist, staring at the blank wall opposite, until Sara Light, the girl beside him, took his fist gently in her hands and cushioned it to stillness.

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"We were like the space bats to them," said Johnny after a bit. "Time and again they'd proved it to us. I called a meeting of the other class representatives — I was Senior Class Rep. Jose Polar for the freshmen sea-Cadets, Martin Connor for the second year group, Mikros Palamas for the juniors. We decided there was no use trying any longer. We went back and told the men in our own class. The next weekend, when we were allowed passes, we all took our rings off and headed as best we could for our own Homes."

He stopped speaking and sat looking across the unvarying surface of the wall.

THEY SWARMED all over him for a second time. But they quieted down soon, the more so as Patrick's banjo did not join them. When it was still again Patrick spoke from under the table.

"You were the one who called the meeting, Johnny?"

"It was me," said Johnny. "I was Senior Representative."

"That's true," said Patrick. A faint E minor chord sounded from the strings of his banjo as if he had just happened to shift his grip on the neck of it. "That's why news has been calling you the ringleader. But you had no choice, I suppose."

"No," said Johnny.

"It'll be a hard thing for them to swallow."

"Perhaps," said Johnny. "I've lived with them four years, and they swallow different than us, Pat. We see and think different than they do. We have instincts already they don't have — and who knows what the next generations will be like? But they're not ready to admit our difference. And until they do, we can't live on dry land with them."

For a second it seemed as if Patrick would not say anything more. Then they heard a faint chord from his banjo again.

"Maybe," said Patrick, "maybe. But we all started with coming from high land in the beginning. A hundred thousand generations of men ashore, and only three or four in the sea. All the history, the art, the music . . . We can't cut ourselves off from that."

His voice stopped.

"We won't," said Emil. He stood up from the chair in which he was sitting. The rest of the people began to rise, too. "We'll be going to Castle-Home, shortly. And Castle-Home will straighten it out with the Closed Congress ashore, the way they've always done before. After all, we're a free people here in the sea. There's no way they can make us do for them against our will."

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The people nearest the exit irises were already slipping out. Beyond the transparent front walls of the small-Home they were leaving. The encompassing waters were already darkening toward opaqueness. By ones and severals, saying good night to Johnny, they melted away toward their own small-Homes in the Joya Group's wheel.

Johnny found himself alone by the pool.

He looked about for Sara, but he could not see her. As he stepped toward the iris leading to the inner part of the small-Home unit, she came out of it. He reached out to her, but she avoided his grasp and took his hand. Puzzled, he let her lead him through the eye-baffling shimmer of the iris.

Beyond it he found not one bedroom, but two. Another iris led to a further sleeping room. But in this first area, a single bed was against a well at the foot of which a small night light glowed.

On the bed under a light cover, his face dug sideways into the softness of a pillow, dampened by his open-breathing mouth, was a small interloper. It was the boy who had spoken up earlier to ask about the space bats.

Politeness was for all ages among the sea people. Johnny stepped to the bed and reached down to shake gently a small bare shoulder and wake him to the fact that he was in the wrong small-Home. But Sara caught Johnny's hand; and when he looked down into her face he found it luminous with an emotion he did not know.

"Tomi," she said. "His name's Tomi. He's your son, Johnny."

JOHNNY STARED at her. They had talked to and written each other across the distance between them these last four and a half years, and never once had she mentioned a child. Among the People, this was her right, if she wished. But somehow Johnny had never thought that with him a woman — and particularly Sara —

He forced his gaze away from her watching face, back down to the boy. His son slept the heavy slumber of childhood's exhaustion.

Slowly he sank on his knees by the bedside, drawing his hand out of Sara's grasp. A chill ran through him. He felt the heavy muscles of his stomach contract. In the small white glow of the nightlight reflected from the palely opaque walls, Tomi slumbered as if in a world remote, not only from land and sea and all the reaches of space, but from all things outside this one small room. He breathed without a sound. His chest movements

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were almost invisible, his skin fine to the point of translucency. The chill in Johnny spread numbness through all his body and limbs, and his neck creaked on stiff tendons.

He reached out slowly. With what seemed an enormous, creased and coarse-skinned fingertip, he traced the slight line of an eyebrow on the boy. The brown, fine hairs were crisp to his touch. An abrupt flush of emotion rushed through him, burning away the chill like a wave of fever. He felt clumsy and helpless; and a wild desire prompted him to gather the boy in his arms and, holding him tightly, snarl above him at all the forces of the universe. Wrung and bewildered, Johnny turned his face up to Sara.

"Sara!" It was almost a wail of despair from his lips.

She knelt down beside him and put her arms around him and the boy, together. He clung to her and the sleeping youngster; and the boy, half-waking, roused and held to them both.

And so they held together, the three of them, there in the glow of the nightlight.

III

IT WAS the hurricane season. One big wind had begun its march north on the day Johnny left the Academy. On the fourth day of his return, it hammered the ocean surface above the Joya Home into spume and dark, tall masses of leaning water. It battered Georgia and the North Carolina shore.

The Joya Home slipped down to twenty fathoms depth and dwelt there in calm, green-blue silence. No effect of the howling, furious borderland between air and water reached down here to the bright wheel-shaped Home, away up in the middle of the ocean universe. The People of the Joya group hardly thought about what was happening above. In their swim-masks or small-Homes, they breathed the atmosphere made for them out of the water elements. They ate and drank of bounty the living ocean supplied. When they reached Castle-Home would be time enough to think about replacing any of the large, complex items of equipment that only the automatories of Castle-Home could supply. Now they were concerned only with the fact of Johnny's being home; and the planning of a party.

But their laughter and their voices were not the pleasure to Johnny that they thought. He told himself he had been too long away. He thought less of their plans and more of the wind and water storming overhead. He felt

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an urge to leave them. To put on mask and fins and swim up to the surface and feel it for himself. But he held back — a little ashamed of how it would look, at this time, for him to sneak off from the rest of his people.

He tried his hand at the charts showing the currents at various depths, a work the Joya group traded for credit against other needed things supplied through Castle-Home. But they no longer seemed important. The third generation did not need them, with their new instinct for location and direction. The older generations would be gone in a few years. And the Landers would have all the use of them.

He could not work, and he could not relax. Sara still seemed to him to be holding back something from him, something he should know. They were both older and it was not the same between them. She had never explained not telling him about Tomi; and the boy did not call him Daddy, but Johnny.

On the fourth morning a call came to rescue him. It was a phone call from Chad Ridell, Chief of Staff for one of the four Castle-Homes about the seawaters of the world. Ridell's Castle-Home was nearest, only about four hundred miles north of where the Joya Home drifted now.

"This time," he said, "we're going to have to form a Council to talk to the Closed Congress." Chad was second-generation. His lean, fifty-four year old face had lines more suited to someone of the first generation. "They're as worked up ashore about this as they were about the whaling industry. Maybe more. I thought we'd eventually have elections, with each ten Homes electing a representative. But for now, I'm simply bespeaking about twenty or so people I think are pretty sure of being elected."

"Patrick, you mean?" said Johnny.

"For one," said Chad. "Because his music's made him known and respected on shore. You, for one of the representatives of the Cadets."

Johnny nodded.

"You'll come as quickly as you can, Johnny?"

"Yes. Patrick too. I'm sure. All of us, I think," said Johnny.

They broke their phone connection and Johnny went to tell the others. Within an hour, the Joya Home was beginning to break into the small-Home sections that made it up. Each small-Home sent an electric current through its outer shell, and the plastic of that shell "remembered" a different shape, changing into an outline like that of a supersonic aircraft. Together, the

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altered small-Homes turned north at a speed of ninety knots, under the thrust of individual drive units that used a controlled hydrogen fusion process to produce high-pressure steam jets. They drove through the still waters for Castle-Home.

FIVE hours later, reunited in wheel-shape, the Joya Home trembled into position and locked down atop a column of nine other previously arrived Homes. Johnny, who was acting pilot for the Home, locked the controls and turned from them.

Tomi said, "Why didn't Mommy wait while you did that?"

Johnny looked down. The small face, in which Johnny often found himself searching for a resemblance to himself, looked up at him across a gulf of years.

"Her own folk's Home may be here," Johnny said. "She wanted to find out."

"Grandpa," said Tomi. "And Grandma Light."

"Yes," Johnny said.

"They're my Grandpa and Grandma. They're not yours." The boy stood with feet apart. "Why didn't *she* take me to see my Grandpa and Grandma Light?"

Johnny looked out the wide transparency before him at the blue waters and the ten-Home upright columns of Castle-Home. "I think she wants us to become better acquainted."

Tomi scowled.

"What's 'acquainted'?"

"We aren't acquainted," said Johnny. He looked back at the boy.

"What," said Tomi, "is ac-*quaint*-ed, I say!"

"Acquainted," said Johnny. "Acquainted's what you are with your mother."

Tomi looked hard at him.

"She's *my* mother," he said at last.

"And you're my son." Johnny gazed at the boy. He was square-shouldered, solid and thick. His eyes were not brown like Sara's but blue like Johnny's. But their blueness was as transparent and unreflective as a pane of glass.

Johnny said suddenly, "Did your mother ever take you to see the corral at a Castle-Home?"

"Uhh-uh!" Tomi shook his head slowly from side to side. "She never took me."

"Get your mask and fins on, then," said Johnny. "I'll take you."

Outside the small-Home entrance iris, they found Baldur waiting with Sara's bottle-nosed dolphin, Neta, and Neta's half-grown pup, Tantrums.

"Not now, Tantrums!" Tomi shoved the five-foot pup aside and reached toward Baldur; but Baldur evaded the boy, spiraling up on Johnny's far side. Tomi

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muttered something and grabbed at the reins of the harness on Neta, who let him take them willingly.

"No," said Johnny. The mutter had barely reached his ears over the underwater radio circuit built into the swim masks. If they had been relying on voice-box communication from mask to mask through the water it would not have reached him at all. But he felt it was time to settle this matter. "Baldur is not your dolphin."

Tomi muttered once more. This time it was truly unintelligible, but Johnny did not need to understand the words in this case.

"Our sea-friends pick us, not we them," said Johnny. "Baldur picked me many years ago. While I was gone he let you use him, but now I'm back. You'll have to let him do what he wants."

TOMI said nothing. Letting the dolphins pull them, they headed across the top of Castle-Home through three fathoms of water to a far area of open water where yellow warning buoys stood balanced at various depths. Neta jerked the reins suddenly from Tomi and, herding Tantrums ruthlessly before her, headed home.

"Bad Neta!" shouted Tomi through his voice-box. "Bad dolphin!"

"No, careful dolphin," said Johnny. "What do yellow buoys stand for?"

"Danger," muttered Tomi. He glanced at Baldur and grumbled again.

"Don't blame the dolphin," said Johnny. "If Sara were here, Neta wouldn't leave her even for Tantrum's sake. It's nothing against you. Some day you'll have your own dolphin for a sea-friend, and it'll stick with you."

"Won't!" muttered Tomi. "I don't want scared little dolphins! A great, great, big space bat, that's what I'll get!"

"Suit yourself," said Johnny. "Well, that's the corral, beyond the buoys there and for four miles out. Want to go in?"

Tomi's face mask jerked up sharply toward his father.

"Pass the yellow . . .?"

"As long as I'm with you. Well?" Tomi kicked himself forward.

"Let's go in, Johnny."

"All right. Stay close now." Johnny led the way. Tomi crowded him. Baldur hesitated, then spurted level with them.

They swam forward for thirty or forty feet. Tomi gradually forged ahead. Then, suddenly, he went into a flurry of movement, flipped around and swam thrashingly back into Johnny.

"Daddy!" He clung to Johnny's right arm and chest. *"Killers!"*

Johnny put his left arm in-

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stinctively around the boy. Holding him, Johnny could feel the abrupt and powerful surge of his own heart and the warmth of blood cresting out through his own body.

"It's all right," Johnny said. "They're muzzled."

Tomi still clung. The warmth racing through Johnny came up against a different, powerful pressure that seemed to spread out and down from behind his ears.

"Look at them," he said. Tomi did not move. The pressure moved further out and downward. He put his hands around the small waist and overpowered the boy's grip, turning him around. He held his son out, facing the killer whales.

For a second, as he turned him, Tomi had gone rigid through all his body. Now the rigidity began to go out of him. He stared straight at the looming shape of the nearest killer whale with the open basket-weaving of the enormous muzzle covering the huge head. Johnny's fingers pressed about the light arch of childish ribs; but he felt no shiver or tremble. He was aware of Baldur quivering in the water at his back; but between his hands there was only stillness.

The boy relaxed even more. He hung, staring at the great, dim shape just ahead. After a second his hands went to Johnny's hand and he pushed Johnny's grip from his waist. He swam a few strokes forward.

Johnny felt the hard beating of his own heart against the pressure in his brain. He was tense as a strung bow himself; and his heart beat with the hard, proud rhythm of a man forging a sword for his own carrying. Without warning he remembered the striped gold length of a Siberian tiger lying in his cage outdoors at the zoo ashore in San Diego. And the small, dancing figure of a ruby-throated hummingbird which floated from some nearby yellow tulips, in through the gleaming bars of the cage. It had hesitated, then, hovering on the blurred motion of its wings, moved driftingly toward the great head and sleepy eye of the tiger that watched it advancing.

Johnny looked about him.

AT FIRST there had been only the one killer to be seen. Now, like long boxcar length resolving out of the green dimness, other ponderous, dark-backed shapes were making their appearance without seeming to exert any effort of swimming. It was as if they coalesced, and came drifting close under some magnetic influence. They approached sideways. Through the open-work of the muzzle about the one now

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drifting, rising toward him on his left, Johnny could see the murderously cheerful mouth, the dark intelligent watching of the eye.

The eye, dark and reflective, approached Johnny, growing as it came. Behind it lay the large cetacean brain, and a mind close to Johnny's own. But that mind was a stranger, self-sufficient. Staring now into the approaching eye, Johnny thought he caught there his own sea-image. And it came to him then that it was for something like this he had advised the Cadets' return. It was for something like this that he had brought his son to the killer's pen.

Very mighty, ignorant of domination, moved by deep instincts to act to an end unseen but surely felt, the reflecting eye of the killer whale looked out on an unending liquid universe where there were no lords, no chains, nor any walls. Through this universe only the dark tides of instinct moved back and forth. For the killer whale as for the people, now, those dark tides spoke with a voice of certainty. To listen to that voice, to follow the path it told of, setting aside all things of the moment, all pity, all fear of life or death— it was this knowledge Johnny saw reflected in the killer's eye. In those dark tides, movement, there was neither wife nor child, nor friend nor enemy — but only truth and what the mind desired. First came survival. After that what the individual chose to accept. That was the truth, the secret and the truce of the dark tides.

And that was why, thought Johnny over the strong beating of his heart, that it had been safe to bring his son to this place. His son was of the sea. In this place was the truce of the sea, and in that truce he was safe.

"Daddy!"

Tomi's voice shouted suddenly in Johnny's earphone, in the close confines of the mask and over the sound of the bubbling exhaust valve.

"Daddy! Look at me!"

JOHNNY JERKED around in the water. Twenty feet from him and a little higher in the water, Tomi was violating one of the oldest knowledges of the people — that the quicksilver members of the dolphin family hated to be held or clung to by any but their oldest friends. Like a boy on a Juggernaut, Tomi rode high on the shoulder area of the first killer whale.

" — Tomi," said Johnny. He felt neither beating, nor pressure now. Only a wide, hollow feeling inside him. He kept his voice calm.

"Uh-huh!" Tomi kicked carelessly with the heels of his swim

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fins against the great swelling sides of the killer. Five feet ahead and below him, the dark eye there looked like a poker player's through an opening in the muzzle. It gazed steadily on Johnny. The great flukes of the killer, capable of smashing clear through the side of a small rowboat, hung still in the water. Johnny thought of the truce, of the primitive sense of fun to be found in all the dolphins, the savage humor of the killer whales.

"Tomi," he said, surprised at his own calmness, "it's time to go home."

"All right." Surprisingly without argument, Tomi kicked free of the twenty-five-foot shape and swam down towards his father. For a moment Johnny saw the boy beating by the muzzle where the dark eye watched, and then he was swimming freely toward Johnny.

Johnny turned and they swam together toward the edge of the corral. Baldur shot on ahead.

"Tomi — " said Johnny; and found words did not some easily. He started again. "I should have warned you not to get close to them. Killers aren't like dolphins —"

"He's going to be my sea-friend, I think," said Tomi, kicking vigorously through the water.

"Tomi," said Johnny, "killers don't make friends like dolphins."

"Then why does he keep coming after me, Daddy?"

Johnny's head jerked around to look back over his shoulder. A dozen feet behind them, the basket shape of a killer whale's muzzle was gliding through the water. At that moment the yellow buoys loomed before them, and they passed through. Here the killer should stop following. But he came on through with them.

"Tomi," said Johnny quietly. "You see the iris in the wall there?"

"I see it," said Tomi, looking ahead to the side of Castle-Home.

"When I tell you to, in just a minute when we get close, I want you to start swimming for it. And don't look back. You understand? I want you to swim as fast as you can and not stop."

The sudden wild clangor of an alarm bell broke through his words, racketing through the water all around them and over Castle-Home. And a buzzer sounded in the earphones of their mask-radio circuit.

"All bespoke members of the Council, this is Chad Ridell speaking," said the voice of the Chief of Staff of Castle-Home. "Please come to the Conference Room at once. All members —" Chad's voice repeated the request twice more.

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"Daddy!" said Tomi, as the voice stopped. Johnny turned swiftly to him. "Look, Daddy," Johnny followed the boy's pointing finger and saw the waters behind them empty and still. "My killer's *gone!*"

"Never mind," said Johnny automatically. "We've got to streak for home now." He caught up a rein from Baldur and handed another rein to Tomi.

When the two of them entered their own small-Home again, Sara was back.

"Mommy! Mommy, listen!" Tomi ripped off his mask. "We went in the corral with the killers. And I made friends with one and rode on his back and he followed us but the bell scared him —"

Sara's face flashed up to stare into Johnny's. Her eyes were wide, her nose pinched, the skin over her cheekbones tight and pale. There was an abruptly white look to her eyes.

"I've got to go — " said Johnny. He pulled on his mask and hurried out of the small-Home.

HE SAW HE was late as he stepped into the conference room. About twenty of the people were already there. They were seated in a semicircle near the far end of the green-walled room, around the broadcast image of a small middle-aged man, standing, in gray slacks and Lander jacket. Johnny recognized him. It was Pul Vant, Secretary-Advocate for the Closed Congress, governing body of the grouped nations of the land.

Johnny came up quietly and took a seat. His cousin Patrick was among those already there, as were two other representatives of the ex-Cadets — Mikros Palamas and Tom Loy. Besides these, he recognized Chad Ridell, and Toby Darnley of the Communications Dome, here at Castle-Home. And Anna Marieanna, a dark-haired woman of the second generation, startlingly beautiful still in her forties and in spite of the fact her left hand was gone at the wrist. She smiled at him across the semicircle, and he smiled back briefly.

". . . ringleaders," Pul Vant was saying.

"I tell you," Ridell interrupted. "There are no ringleaders among the people."

"Very well. Setting that aside then — " Vant gestured neatly with his hands as he talked. He had the smooth movements of an actor. "I'm trying to explain to you what the Space Program and the Academy can mean to a frontierless people ashore." He went on talking. It was an old argument, one Johnny had heard before. He looked around the

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semi-circle, noting the difference of his people from this little man of the land. Anna Marieanna was not the only one marked by the sea among the older generations; and in his own generation the very structure of mind and body was different. Different from the Landers. Already they were starting to use the same words to mean different things on each side. And the dangerous thing was they did not realize the difference was there in their words.

"NOW," VANT was saying, "the Congress is ready to make the same offer. To take you in as a full member nation . . ."

"No," said Chad.

"You understand," Vant said, "we can't have six million people without even a government holding seventy-point-eight per cent of the world's surface area. You can't do that."

"We've been doing it," said Chad. "We intend to keep on."

Vant lifted his hands and let them drop.

"I'm sorry," he said. "There's nothing I can do then, I just explain the situation, that's all my job is. You know, historically, the tail's never been let to wag the dog very long." He ran his eyes around the semicircle. They met Johnny's eyes, paused for a second, then passed on. "If the rest of the Cadets'll come back voluntarily . . . Otherwise, public opinion's going to get out of hand." He looked at Chad. "We don't *want* to declare war on you."

"No," said Chad. "You don't want that."

Vant waved an easy hand and disappeared. The people rose and began to shove their chairs back to make a full circle, breaking out at the same time into a clatter of conversation. Johnny found himself next to Chad.

"He talked like they caught some of us?" Johnny said. Chad looked at him.

"Yes," he said. "A hundred and twenty-nine didn't make it to the sea. They're holding them at Congress Territory on Manhattan. He said they may be tried as deserters."

"Deserters?" Johnny stopped shoving his chair.

"Why should they?" he heard Toby Darnley, of the Communications Dome of Castle-Home, his slightly shrill voice rising over the others. "Why should they give in at all? We can't give in to them. We can't let them put a leash around our necks. But we can't let them put those boys before a firing squad, either." Glancing across the room, Johnny saw Toby's small, square face was rigid and dark. "What is there we can do?"

Beside Johnny, Chad sat down.

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The circle was formed now. Johnny saw he was the only one standing. For some reason, following the shock of what he had just heard, he found his mind filled by a memory of the eye of the killer whale, as he had seen it watching through the openings in the muzzle. The dark eye, hidden of meaning, and steady. In the same moment something moved in him. It suddenly seemed to him that he felt the actual presence of the hundred and twenty-nine prisoner Cadets, as he had felt Tomi between his hands.

"We can save them," he said. "We can go rescue our own people."

They all stared at him. The roomful of people were silent. Though the four walls of the room barred all about him, he felt the eye of the killer whale through them upon him, steadily watching.

IV

ONLY Patrick said no to the idea. But when the rest of the council all voted for it, he said nothing more. He sat without talking, watching Johnny. After a little while he left them to their planning.

The sea people could always move at a moment's notice. In an emergency they could almost dispense with the notice. Three hours later, a spindle-shaped formation of small-Homes in their craft-shape bored due east through the brilliant blueness of the hundred-fathom depth toward the New York shore. Before them, a vibratory weapon on low broadcast power herded the sea-life from their path. Their speed was a hundred and seventy knots.

Piloting the lead craft, Johnny stood alone at the controls. The small-Homes behind held nearly five hundred men, almost every one of the ex-Cadets who had been in Castle-Home at the time. The small-Homes were supplied with automatic controls. The ex-Cadets had explosives, the radio equipment built into their masks and take-apart sonic rifles and vibratory weapons of the sort the people used for sea-hunting. The element of surprise was on their side, they thought they knew where the prisoners were being held in Congress Territory, and they had a plan.

In the lead craft, alone, facing the empty, luminous waters showing through the transparent wall before him, Johnny felt detatched from the speed of their movement. All sound was damped out and there were no signposts to gauge by, only the strange blue twilight of a hundred fathoms down that had so fascinated Beebe in his first

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bathysphere descent a hundred years before. It glowed through the transparent forward wall to wrap Johnny in the unreal feeling of a dream. He, the sea, the ex-Cadets behind him — even the destination to which they were all hurtling — seemed ghostlike and unreal.

The sound of footsteps behind him, in the small-Home where he was supposed to be alone, jerked him around sharply.

"Patrick!" he said.

Patrick, dressed like all the ex-Cadets in black, elastic cold-water skins, swim mask and fins, came like some shuffling monster out of the rear dimness of the small-Home to stand beside Johnny.

"I stowed away," said Patrick. He was looking out at the blue.

"But why? You were against this, weren't you?" Johnny peered at him. Patrick slowly turned his head, but the apparently brilliant blue was so dim that Johnny could not make out the expression on Patrick's face.

"Yes," said Patrick. "I had to. It's true, you know, Johnny. You're a ringleader."

"Ringleader?" Johnny leaned toward him, but still he could not make out the look on Patrick's face.

"Yes," said Patrick. "Just like you were at the Academy. You decide something on your own. And then you always push it through."

"What did I push through?" Johnny let go the controls. On automatic, independent, the craft bored on, leading the formation.

"This." Pat's voice changed. "Johnny," he said. "Johnny, turn back."

"But we have to do this," said Johnny. "Why can't you see that, Pat? We've already broken off from the Landers. We're different."

"You think you're different," said Patrick.

"I know it. So do all the third generation. You know it, Pat." He peered again, unsuccessfully. "You want to make me personally responsible for all this?"

"Yes," said the blur of Patrick's face. "For a war we can't win."

"It's not war yet," said Johnny.

"It's war. War with the land. I wish I could stop you, Johnny."

Johnny stood for a second.

"If you feel like that, Pat, why'd you come along?"

Pat laughed, a queer, choking sort of laugh. "I knew you wouldn't turn back. I had to ask you, though."

He turned and walked back, away. In the dimness, his outline seemed to melt, rather than go off. Left alone, Johnny felt the blue illumination as if it shone coldly through him.

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Once he and Patrick had been as alike in their thoughts as twin brothers. They had gone off on months-long expeditions, alone with their dolphins and sonic rifles, living off the open sea like dolphins themselves. Now, in this new dimness, he could not even call clearly to mind his cousin's face. What he remembered was overlaid by the picture of Patrick that had been on the Moho tape in the music store ashore.

Johnny turned back to the controls, and put his mind to the coming work.

OFF Jones Beach, they left the small-Homes. Half of these they put together in a mock-up of one of the large Lander deep-sea subs, resting in the Brooklyn Navy Yard a handful of miles away. This and the smaller ships were sent off on automatic controls, to rendezvous with the expedition later in the East River alongside Congress Territory. Individually, Patrick and Johnny among them, they dispersed and headed shoreward — to emerge at last in the early evening of a hot July day, among the Lander swimmers and skin-divers of the crowded beach.

Johnny bought Lander throwaway clothes and changed into them in a pullman dressing-room above the beach. His disassembled sonic rifle and his swim mask

with its radio were tucked in under his belt. He headed in to Manhattan.

The first step toward rescuing the prisoners was so completely without incident it was almost dull. Congress Territory covered a full twenty-block area running south from where the old Queensboro bridge had been. It

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was a show place, beautifully terraced and landscaped, and quite open. At midnight, Johnny reached the broad boulevard entrance at the north end and saw Mikros and Tom Loy come up to him.

"All clear?" Johnny asked.

"All clear," said Mikros. His big face under its black hair was grinning. Tom Loy looked a little pale under the lights of the Manhattan dome, but steady enough. Johnny himself felt a little as he had felt facing the killer whales with Tomi.

"Move everybody in, then," Johnny said. They went in. Half an hour later, without being stopped, they were spread out around the plaza, surrounded by office

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buildings, that lay before the old U. N. Secretariat. The pool in the plaza was black and still.

"What if they aren't in the blast shelter under the Secretariat Building?" Tom Loy asked. He had asked it twice before.

"Where else could they hold a hundred and twenty-nine men?" asked Johnny. "But if they aren't, we'll just have to search." He took Tom and a dozen of the ex-Cadets. They went in the Secretariat Building, down the regular escalators, to a special old fashioned, mechanical elevator in a sub-basement. They went down this; and it let them out all at once into a guardroom filled with Closed Congress soldiers, half-dressed and wholly unready to fight.

The soldiers submitted without protest. They were lined up and disarmed. The inner doors to the blast shelter were broken open and the captured ex-Cadets poured out.

"That's good," said Johnny to Tom Loy. "Now, we'll get them upstairs as quickly as we can."

He was turning back to the elevator — when the dull, heavy sound of a sonic explosion from above rattled the elevator in its shaft.

FOR a second no one moved. Then Johnny snatched his swim mask out of his pocket, thumbed the controls and spoke into his radio mike.

"Mikros?" he said. "What happened?"

Mikros's voice was suddenly blurred by the buzzing of a distorter. "Soldiers up in the buildings!"

"Take charge," said Johnny to Tom Loy. He ran for the elevator, rode it up, then ran up the humming escalators to the ground floor.

The present-day ground floor of the Secretariat was fronted by a conservatory lush with flowers, trees and other plants. Looking through its foliage, Johnny saw most of the dome lights were out over the place. In the dimness, the sea people had taken cover where they could behind hedges and ornamental trees surrounding the pool. From the buildings on three sides of the plaza military gunfire was reaching for them.

Mike was not to be seen. The springing of the trap had evidently caught him somewhere outside. The ventilation was off; and smoke, drifting out of the building on Johnny's right, was thickening and fogging the air in layers that did not move. Water had been splashed out of the pool, darkening a terrace as if the building itself was bleeding. Otherwise, there was no blood to be seen, for the sonic and vibra-

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tory weapons wounded and damaged internally.

The distorter, set going to make any bounce-echo sighting mechanism of a sonic rifle useless, buzzed eerily in the heads of all. It sang in Johnny's inner ear like a noise heard in high fever. As he looked about the plaza he saw, here and there, bodies of the sea people, lying still.

Up toward the front of the conservatory, behind a lemon tree in a wooden tub, one of the ex-Cadets crouched suddenly, putting his forehead to the pavement. Johnny ran and knelt down beside him. But when he put his hand on the boy's shoulder, the other went over on one side and lay still with a little trickle of blood showing at the corner of his mouth. It was one of the freshman class. His eyes were closed and his skin showed nearly as finely transparent as Tomi's had been in his sleep. Johnny stared at him, for he could not even now remember the other's name.

"Johnny —" said someone. He looked up and saw Tom Loy. "We're all upstairs."

"Yes." Johnny climbed automatically to his feet. He glanced along the Secretariat's front to the sort of alley between buildings that led to the East River. No soldiers blocked it yet. "Everybody out. Tell Mike." The smoke was thick around them now. "You come with me."

He led the way in a dash to the corner of the Secretariat building at the alley's entrance. They knelt there and burrowed with their hands in the soft earth of a flower bed. Tom packed a number of the yellow cubes of explosive jelly that they used for deep-sea mining into the hole. Sea people hurried, staggered by them through the smoke.

"Are they all out?" asked Johnny, setting the radio detonator.

"All out, Mike?" Tom asked in open speech into his radio mike.

"All but me." Johnny, putting on his mask, heard Mikros's voice over the distorter in his earphone. "I'll be along in a —"

THE swelling impact of another sonic explosion shuddered through the square. Johnny looked and saw Tom's lips move, but he heard nothing. They were deafened. Johnny waved Tom on toward the river; and Tom leaped up, then ran off through the smoke.

Johnny waited. Mikros did not appear. There was no more time. Johnny turned and ran, pressing the detonator transceiver. Behind him the smoke billowed and swirled in an explosion he could not hear. He ran for the river.

"All over, into the water," he

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shouted into his mike; but he could not even hear himself. He felt an unexpected fear. If they could not hear him . . .

But then he reached the balcony, fifty feet above the river; and all was going well. The unhurt ex-Cadets were going over feet-first. The wounded were being slid down escape chutes of plastic. The small-Homes and the imitation Lander sub were waiting in the water below. He could see little of this in the smoke, but he knew it was so. Suddenly he seemed to hook in on a network of awareness. It was as it had been when he had stood in the conference room and felt the hundred and twenty-nine prisoners as if he held them like Tomi, between his hands. In this emergency some new instinct of the third generation was taking over; and they were all a unit.

"Keep moving," he said automatically. He felt they heard him. Then he realized it was his own numbed hearing beginning to clear. A little moving air off the river cleared the smoke from the balcony. Only Tom Loy was standing with him. He motioned Tom over, then turned to go himself. Then he felt one of the people still coming from the direction of the plaza.

"Mike," he said, turning. But then the one coming broke into the clear air of the balcony, and it was not Mikros, but Patrick with a soldier's vibratory rifle in his hands. "You, Pat?" said Johnny, staring. Suddenly it broke on him. "*You* told them about us!"

Pat stopped a few feet from him. The rifle he held wavered, pointing at Johnny. Then, with a sort of sob, Patrick threw the gun from him, grabbed Johnny, stooped and threw him back over the balcony. Johnny turned instinctively like a cat in the air. And the water smashed hard against him.

He caught himself, readjusting his mask, six feet under. Below him he saw the small-Homes waiting. He turned and swam down to them.

V

"DON'T hang to your father," said Sara to Tomi, when Johnny was once more back in the small-Home with them.

"But —"

"Not now," Sara said. "They're waiting for him in the Conference Room. Daddy just came by for a minute, and we have to talk. Go swim outside."

Tomi hesitated, standing on one foot, face screwed up.

"You go!" said Sara. Her voice had a hard note in it Johnny had never heard before. Tomi's eyes went wide and he left.

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Johnny watched him go numbly. The Lander subs had chased them out into open sea. The decoy they had made out of the small-Homes had drawn them off. On automatic controls, it had led the subs three miles deep to the Atlantic ooze and then blown itself up, taking at least one sub with it. A Lander sub carried over two hundred men. There had been more than a hundred of the ex-Cadets who had not come back.

Riding home after that in the rest of the small-Homes, those that returned had begun to sing *"Hey, Johnny!"* And the song had spread over the radio circuit from ship to ship until they all sang. Johnny had turned his face to the rushing blue beyond the transparent wall of his craft to hide the fact he could not sing along with them.

Patrick's voice had sounded again in his ears. *"You're a ringleader —"*

"— I've got to talk to you about Tomi," Sara was saying.

"Now?" he said dully. His real reason for detouring by here on his way to the Conference Room was that he had wanted to hide for a few moments. At the sound of his son's name he shivered unexpectedly. The dark eye of the killer whale had come back to his mind. But now it gazed without change and without pity on the still shape of the young ex-Cadet he had seen die in the conservatory, ashore.

"I've never told you why I didn't let you know about you having a son, all these years. Do you know why?"

"Why?" He focused on her with difficulty. "No — no, I don't." He became aware, for the first time, that her face was stiff and pale. "Sara, what is it?"

"I didn't tell you," she said as if she were reciting a lesson, "because I didn't want him to be like you."

He thought of Patrick and the men who were now dead.

"Well," he said, "I don't blame you."

"Don't *blame* me!" Without warning she began to cry. It was not the easy, relief-giving sorrow of the people. Her tears were angry. She stood with them running down her cheeks and her fists clenched, facing him. "I knew what you were like when I fell in love with you! I knew you'd always be going and pushing things through. No matter what it cost, no matter who it hurt. You say things and people do them — it's something about you! And you just take it all for granted."

He put his hands on her to soothe her, but she was as hard as a rock.

"But you weren't going to kill my baby!" she thrust at him. "I

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was going to hide him — keep him safe, so he'd never know what his father was like and want to go and be like him. And go away from me, too, without thinking of anything but what he personally wanted to do, and get himself killed all for nothing."

"Sara —" he said.

"And then you came back. And he told me all about that business in the killer whale corral. And then I knew it was no use. No use at all. Because he was just like you. He was born just like you, and there was nothing I could do to protect him, no matter what I did. My baby . . ." and with that, at last she broke down. All the hardness went out of her; and he held her to him as she cried.

For a moment or two he thought the crisis was over. But she stiffened again and pulled away from him.

"You've got to make me a promise," she said, wiping her eyes.

"Of course," he said.

"Not of course. You listen to what I want. You make me a promise that if anything happens to me, you'll take care of him. You'll keep him safe. Not the way you would — the way I'd keep him safe. You promise me."

"Nothing's going to happen to you."

"Promise me!"

"All right," he said. "I promise I'll take care of him the way you would."

She wiped her eyes again. "You'd better go now. They'll be waiting for you. Oh, wait." She turned and hurried from him, back into the bedroom. She came back in a second with a tangle of smashed plastic and dangling wires.

"Patrick left it for you," she said. "He said you'd understand."

Numbly he took the ruined banjo.

WHEN he finally reached the Conference Room, it was full of Council members.

"It's war," said Chad Ridell, looking at him bleakly. "We got their declaration an hour after you landed at Jones Beach. And an hour before one of our gull-cameras picked up this."

He touched a button on his chair. The end of the room blanked out. Johnny saw a gull's-view image of the Atlantic sea-surface in the cold, gray-blue light of early dawn. His sea-instinct recognized the spot as less than a hundred miles south.

"Look," said Chad. There was a flicker in the sky, and a hole yawned suddenly huge and deep in the ocean's face. For a moment the unnatural situation lasted. And then leaping up through the hole moved a fist of water. It

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lifted toward the paling sky of dawn like a mountain torn from the ocean floor; and a roar like that of some huge, tortured beast burst on the Conference Room.

The fist stretched out into a pillar, broke and disintegrated. A cow biscay whale drifted by on her side, trying to turn over, blood running from the corner of her mouth.

"Sonic explosion," said Johnny. "Big enough for all Castle-Home."

"They meant that declaration of war," said Chad.

"But why bomb empty ocean?" Johnny said.

"Castle-Home was there three hours ago," put in Tom Loy, who was standing close by Chad. "They must have spotted us from a satellite and thought we were still close. We can stay deep from now on, though."

Johnny nodded. Castle-Home had been at a hundred fathoms when the expedition had come back. He remembered what he was carrying.

"No," he said, "even that won't work." He handed the tangle of broken plastic and wires to Chad, who stared at it, blankly.

"It's Patrick's banjo," said Johnny. "Pat went in with us. He was the one who tipped off the Congress soldiers so that they laid that trap in the plaza for us. He's on their side now."

"But Patrick —" Tom Loy stared at him across Chad. "Patrick's third generation! He can find Castle-Home as well as any of us."

"That's right," said Johnny.

"But I don't understand it!" Chad got up abruptly from his chair. He faced Johnny. "Why Patrick — Patrick of all people?"

"I don't know," said Johnny. "He thinks we're wrong to fight the land. It's what he believes, I guess." He shrugged his shoulders unhappily. "Maybe I was wrong."

"You don't believe that," said Tom.

"No, I guess not." Johnny tried to smile at Tom. "At any rate, the only thing that seems to make sense to me, now, is for me and anyone else who wants to come with me to give ourselves up to them." He glanced at Chad. "If they get what they call ringleaders, maybe —"

Cutting through what he was going to say, came the sudden, brazen shrieking of the alarm bell.

"Missile!" cried a voice from the wall speaker of the room. "This is the Communications Dome. Missile approaching! Missile —"

A SOUND too great to be heard folded all around them. Johnny felt himself picked up and carried away at an angle upward. He ducked away from the

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ceiling, but the ceiling was no longer there. For a second, still moving, he was in a little box of air, with water all around him. Then the water closed in on him, he felt himself seeming to fly apart in all directions, and he lost track abruptly of what was going on.

. . . At some time later when he came back to his senses, he and the world about him were moving very fast. He was rushing through the water in the black suit of cold-water skins he had never taken off and his mask was over his face, in position. Baldur was with him. He had hold of the dolphin's reins and Baldur was towing him swiftly through debris-strewn water at about the fifteen-fathom depth. They came at last to Johnny's own small-Home, sheared almost in half and floating loggily in the surrounding water.

The pool entrance was missing. Neta, Sara's dolphin, was frantically trying the impossible feat of entering the small-Home through the air-iris, all unmindful of Tantrums beside her. Johnny pushed her aside and dove through himself.

Across the room, beyond the pool, he saw Sara lying on a couch covered by a drape. Tomi was sitting huddled with his knees together on a hassock beside the couch. Johnny ran around the pool and dropped on his knees by the couch.

"My mommy's not feeling good," Tomi said.

Johnny looked at Sara. The world, which had been moving so fast about him, slowed and stopped. All things came to an end, and stopped.

Sara lay still, on her back. There was a little blood dried at the corners of her mouth. Her eyes were not quite closed. They looked from under her eyelids at nothing in particular and her cheeks seemed already sunken in a little under her high, cold cheekbones.

He stared down at her and a slow and terrible chill began to creep gradually through him. He could not take his eyes off her still face. Slowly he began to shiver. The shivers increased until he shuddered through his whole body and his teeth chattered. He saw Tomi coming toward him with arms outstretched to put them around his father. And suddenly Johnny broke the spell holding him and shoved the boy back, away from him, so hard he staggered.

"Stay away from me!" Johnny shouted. The room tilted and spun around him. The eye of the killer whale rushed abruptly like death upon him through the wall behind the couch, and he fell forward into roaring nothingness.

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WHEN he came back after this, it was to find Tomi clinging to him and sobbing. Johnny awoke as somebody might who had been asleep for a long night. The great gust of feeling that had whirled him into unconsciousness was gone. He felt numbed and coldly clear-headed. Automatically he soothed Tomi. Reflexively he went about the small-Home, pulling out a sea-sled and loading it with clothing, medical supplies, weapons and other equipment for living off the sea.

When it was loaded he took it outside and left Tomi, now also dressed in cold-water skins, fins and mask, to harness Baldur to it. He himself went back inside.

He set straight the drape over Sara and stood a little while looking down at her body. Then he detached the governor from the small-Homes heating element and went back outside. Together, he and Tomi watched as the small-Home caught fire inside.

Collapsing inward, as its walls melted, it sank away from them, a flickering light into dark depths, with Neta and her pup circling bewilderedly down after it.

"Where are we going?" said Tomi, as Johnny handed a rein to Tomi and took one himself.

"Where you'll be safe," said Johnny. He put the boy's other hand on a rail of the sled.

"All by ourselves?" said Tomi.

"Yes." Johnny broke off suddenly. Inside Tomi's mask, he saw the boy pale and frowning, the way Sara had been used to frown. Something moved in Johnny's guts. "All right," he said; but he did not say it to Tomi.

He touched the radio controls of his mask with his tongue, turning the circle of reception up to full. A roar of conversations sounded like surf in his ears.

"This is Johnny Joya," he said into the mike. "Are there any Council members listening?" The surf-sound of voices roared on unchanging. "This is Johnny Joya speaking. Are there any Council members who can hear me?"

There seemed no change in the sound coming into his earphone. He turned to Tomi, shrugging. And then the roar began to diminish a little. It slackened. "This is Johnny Joya," he said. "Are there any Council members listening?"

The voices dwindled, faded and disappeared. Silence roared instead in his earphone. From far away, blurredly, a single voice spoke.

"Johnny? Johnny, is that you? This is Tom Loy. Johnny, we're the only Council members left. I found the room. None of the rest got out." Tom hesitated. "Johnny, can you hear me? Where are you?"

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"North of you," said Johnny. "And swimming north." There was a cold, clean, dead feeling in him, like a man might experience after an amputation when the pain was blocked. "I'm taking my son, my dolphin and sea-camping equipment and I'm heading out."

"Heading out?"

"YES," said Johnny.

He touched the rein and moved it and Baldur began to swim, pulling the sled and the two humans with it. Through the rushing gray-blue water, Johnny saw the young arm and hand of Tomi in its black sleeve clinging to the sled rail; and he remembered Patrick's arm, older and larger, seem in the same position. "The rest of you should do the same thing."

"Head out?" Tom's voice faded for a second in the earphone. "Out into the sea without small-Homes?"

"That's right," said Johnny. He watched Baldur sliding smoothly through the water. "Castle-Home is gone. By this time the other Castle-Homes are probably gone, too. We're Homeless, now. Everybody might as well face that."

"But we're going to have to build new Homes."

"We can't," said Johnny. "With Patrick helping, the Landers'll just go on destroying them."

"But we've got to have Homes!"

"No," said Johnny. A strap on the sled was working loose. He reached forward automatically and unbuckled it. "That's what the Landers think. But they're wrong. Everyone of the third generation and lots of the second have lived off the sea without Homes, for the fun of it. We can do it permanently. We can take care of the older people, as well, if they want."

"But," Tom's voice came stronger in the earphone for a second, "we'll be nothing but a lot of water-gypsies!" He fell silent, as if he had suddenly run out of words.

"No," said Johnny. He pulled the strap tight and buckled it again. It held well this time. "Our Homes were something we brought to the sea from the land. Sooner or later we were bound to leave them behind and live like true people of the sea. The Land's just pushed us to it a little early." He checked the other straps. They were all tight. "I'm only telling you what I think. That's what I'm doing."

There was a long moment of rushing silence in the earphone. Then Tom's voice called out.

"Johnny! You aren't leaving us?"

"Yes," said Johnny.

"But some day we'll be carry-

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ing the fight back to the Landers. We need you to plan for then. We need you — "

"No!" The word came out so harshly that Johnny saw Tomi flinch alongside him and stare in his direction. "I've helped too much already. Get someone else to make your plans!"

He felt Tomi's eyes reach into him. He reached himself for calmness. For a moment he had almost come back to life, but now the safe feeling, the cold, clean, dead feeling, took him over once again.

"No," he said, more quietly. "You don't want my help, Tom. And besides, my wife is dead and I made her a promise to keep our boy safe. That's all the job I have now. I would't take any other if I could. If you'll take a last piece of advice, though, you'll all scatter the way I'm doing. Spread out through the seas, we'll be safe." He turned off his mike, then turned it on. "Good-by, Tom," he said. "Good-by, people. Good luck to you all."

TOM'S voice spoke again, but Johnny no longer listened. He picked up the rein turned Baldur's head a little to the northeast, along the water road of the North Atlantic Current. He shut his mind to all the past.

Baldur responded smoothly. He swam easily and not too fast, in the graceful underwater up and down weaving motion of the dolphin that brought him occasionally to the surface to breathe. In the earphone, the perplexed conversations picked up once more.

Johnny did not listen. He felt emptied of all emotion. Of sorrow, of bitterness, of fear of anger. He looked ahead and northward into a future as wide and empty as the Arctic waters. Only the wild wastes of the endless oceans were left now to the people of the sea. They would gather at Castle-Home no more.

He thought that he had no more feeling left in him; and that this was a good thing. And then, in his earphone, he heard one of the parting people begin to sing:

Hey, Johnny! Hey-a, Johnny!
Home from the shore . . .

And the voices of others of the people took it up, joining in. The earphone echoed to a spreading chorus.

Hey-o, Johnny! Hey, Johnny!
To high land go no more!

The song blended in many voices. It reached through the cold, dead feeling of amputation in him to the awareness that had come as he stood in the Confer-

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ence Room and felt the beating lives of the hundred and twenty-nine prisoners as if he held them in his hands.

It took hold of him as he had been taken hold of, in the moment of perception that had linked him with the other ex-Cadets as, deafened and smoke-blinded, they made their escape into the East River. He had cut himself loose from his people. But he saw now he could not escape them. No, never could he escape them, any more than a molecule of water, in its long journey by sky and mountain and field and harbor-mouth, could escape its eventual homecoming to the salt sea. And the knowledge of this, discovered at last, brought a sort of sad comfort to him.

He opened his mouth to sing with them; but — as in the small-Home returning from Manhattan Island — he found the words would not come. He held to the sled, listening. About him, three fathoms of water pressed again his passage. Baldur swam strongly to the north. The Atlantic Drift was carrying them east and north and in time they would come to the Irminger Current, swinging north between the Iceland coast and the Greenland shore . . . he, his son, and his dolphin.

Baldur swam strongly, as if he could sense the purpose of their going. Behind, in his earphone, Johnny could hear the voices of the singers beginning to fade and dwindle as they moved out of range. The number of their voices lessened and became distant.

The sun was going down. The three of them broke surface for a moment and the cloud-heavy sky above was darkening gray. Soon it would be full dark, and somewhere in the black water under the stars they would camp and sleep. Tomi held without a word to the sled. The dolphin swam with strength to the north and east. Behind, the last voices were failing, until only one still sounded, faintly in the earphone:

Long away, away, my Johnny!
Four long years and more.
Hey-o, Johnny! Hey, Johnny!
Go to land, no more.

And still the three of them swam to the north, under a gray sky that was like a road, and forever-flowing.

— GORDON R. DICKSON

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by CORDWAINER SMITH

Illustrated by R. D. FRANCIS

I

BEFORE the great ships whispered between the stars by means of planoforming, people had to fly from star to star with immense sails — huge films assorted in space on long, rigid, cold-proof rigging. A small spaceboat provided room for a sailor to handle the sails, check the course and watch the passengers who were sealed, like knots in immense threads, in their little adiabatic pods which trailed behind the ship. The passengers knew nothing, except for going to sleep on earth and waking up on a strange new world forty, fifty or two hundred years later.

This was a primitive way to do it. But it worked.

On such a ship Helen America had followed Mr. Gray-no-more. On such ships the Scanners retained their ancient authority over space. Two hundred planets and more were settled in this fashion, including Old North Australia, destined to be the treasure house of them all.

The Emigration Port was a series of low, square buildings — nothing like Earthport, which

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towers above the clouds like a frozen nuclear explosion.

Emigration Port is dour, drab, dreary and efficient. The walls are black-red like old blood merely because they are cheaper to heat that way. The rockets are ugly and simple; the rocket pits, as inglorious as machine shops. Earth has a few show places to tell visitors about. Emigration Port is not one of them. The people who work there get the privilege of real work and secure professional honors. The people who *go* there become unconscious very soon. What they remember about earth is a little room like a hospital room, a little bed, some music, some talk, the sleep and (perhaps) the cold.

From Emigration Port they go to their pods, sealed in. The pods go to the rockets and these to the sailing ship. That's the old way of doing it.

The new way is better. All a person does now is visit a pleasant lounge, or play a game of cards, or eat a meal or two. All he needs is half the wealth of a planet, or a couple hundred years' seniority marked "excellent" without a single break.

The photonic sails were different. Everyone took chances.

A young man, bright of skin and hair, merry at heart, set out for a new world. An older man, his hair touched with gray, went with him. So, too, did thirty thousand others. And also, the most beautiful girl on earth.

Earth could have kept her, but the new worlds needed her.

She had to go.

She went by light-sail ship. And she had to cross space — space, where the danger always waits.

Space sometimes commands strange tools to its uses — the screams of a beautiful child, the laminated brain of a long-dead mouse, the heartbroken weeping of a computer. Most space offers no respite, no relay, no rescue, no repair. All dangers must be anticipated; otherwise they become mortal. And the greatest of all hazards is the risk of man himself.

"SHE'S BEAUTIFUL," said the first technician.

"She's just a child," said the second.

"She won't look like much of a child when they're two hundred years out," said the first.

"But she *is* a child," said the second, smiling, "a beautiful doll with blue eyes, just going tiptoe into the beginnings of grown-up life." He sighed.

"She'll be frozen," said the first.

"Not all the time," said the second. "Sometimes they wake up. They have to wake up. The machines de-freeze them. You re-

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member the crimes on the *Old Twenty-two*. Nice people, but the wrong combinations. And everything went wrong, dirtily, brutally wrong."

They both remembered *Old Twenty-two*. The hell-ship had drifted between the stars for a long time before its beacon brought rescue. Rescue was much too late.

The ship was in immaculate condition. The sails were set at a correct angle. The thousands of frozen sleepers, strung out behind the ship in their one-body adiabatic pods, would have been in excellent condition, but they had merely been left in open space too long and most of them had spoiled. The inside of the ship — there was the trouble. The sailor had failed or died. The reserve passengers had been awakened. They did not get on well with one another. Or else they got on too horribly well, in the wrong way. Out between the stars, encased only by a frail limited cabin, they had invented new crimes and committed them upon each other — crimes which a million years of earth's old wickedness had never brought to the surface of man before.

The investigators of *Old Twenty-two* had become very sick, reconstructing the events that followed the awakening of the reserve crew. Two of them had asked for blanking and had obviously retired from service.

The two technicians knew all about *Old Twenty-two* as they watched the fifteen-year-old woman sleeping on the table. Was she a woman? Was she a girl? What would happen to her if she did wake up on the flight?

She breathed delicately.

The two technicians looked across her figure at one another and then the first one said:

"We'd better call the psychological guard. It's a job for him."

"He can try," said the second.

THE psychological guard, a man whose number-name ended in the digits Tiga-belas, came cheerfully into the room a half-hour later. He was a dreamy-looking old man, sharp and alert, probably in his fourth rejuvenation. He looked at the beautiful girl on the table and inhaled sharply,

"What's this for — a ship?"

"No," said the first technician, "it's a beauty contest."

"Don't be a fool," said the psychological guard. "You mean they are really sending that beautiful child into the Up-and-Out?"

"It's stock," said the second technician. "The people out on Wereld Schemering are running dreadfully ugly, and they flashed a sign to the Big Blink that they

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had to have better-looking people. The Instrumentality is doing right by them. All the people on this ship are handsome or beautiful."

"If she's that precious, why don't they freeze her and put her in a pod? That way she would either get there or she would not. A face as pretty as that," said Tiga-belas, "could start trouble anywhere. Let alone a ship. What's her name-number?"

"On the board there," said the first technician. "It's all on the board there. You'll want the others too. They're listed, too, and ready to go on the board."

"Veesey-koosey," read the psychological guard, saying the words aloud, "or five-six. That's a silly name, but it's rather cute." With one last look back at the sleeping girl, he bent to his work of reading the case histories of the people added to the reserve crew. Within ten lines, he saw why the girl was being kept ready for emergencies, instead of sleeping the whole trip through. She had a Daughter Potential of 999.999, meaning that any normal adult of either sex could *and would* accept her as a daughter after a few minutes of relationship. She had no skill in herself, no learning, no trained capacities. But she could re-motivate almost anyone older than herself, and she showed a probability of making that re-motivated person put up a gigantic fight for life. For her sake. And secondarily the adopter's.

That was all, but it was special enough to put her in the cabin. She had tested out into the literal truth of the ancient poetic scrap, "the fairest of the daughters of old, old earth."

When Tiga-belas finished taking his notes from the records, the working time was almost over. The technicians had not interrupted him. He turned around to look one last time at the lovely girl. She was gone. The second technician had left and the first was cleaning his hands.

"You haven't frozen her?" cried Tiga-belas. "I'll have to fix her too, if the safeguard is to work."

"Of course you do," said the first technician. "We've left you two minutes for it."

"You give me two minutes," said Tiga-belas, "to protect a trip of four hundred and fifty years!"

"Do you need more," said the technician, and it was not even a question, except in form.

"Do I?" said Tiga-belas. He broke into a smile. "No, I don't. That girl will be safe long after I am dead."

"When do you die?" said the technician, socially.

"Seventy-three years, two months, four days," said Tiga-

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belas agreeably. "I'm a fourth-and-last."

"I thought so," said the technician. "You're smart. Nobody starts off that way. We all learn. I'm sure you'll take care of that girl."

They left the laboratory together and ascended to the surface and the cool restful night of Earth.

II

LATE THE next day, Tiga-belas came in, very cheerful indeed. In his left hand he held a drama spool, full commercial size. In his right hand there was a black plastic cube with shimmering silver contact-points gleaning on its sides. The two technicians greeted him politely.

The psychological guard could not hide his excitement and his pleasure.

"I've got that beautiful child taken care of. The way she is going to be fixed, she'll keep her Daughter Potential, but it's going to be a lot closer to one thousand point double zero than it was with all those nines. I've used a mouse-brain."

"If it's frozen," said the first technician, "we won't be able to put it in the computer. It will have to go forward with the emergency stores."

"This brain isn't frozen," said Tiga-belas indignantly. "It's been laminated. We stiffened it with celluprime and then we veneered it down, about seven thousand layers. Each one has plastic of at least two molecular thicknesses. This mouse can't spoil. As a matter of fact, this mouse is going to go on thinking forever. He won't think much, unless we put the voltage on him, but he'll think. And he can't spoil. This is ceramic plastic, and it would take a major weapon to break it."

"The contacts . . .?" said the second technician.

"They don't go through," said Tigas-belas. "This mouse is tuned into that girl's personality, up to a thousand meters. You can put him anywhere in the ship. The case has been hardened. The contacts are just attached on the outside. They feed to nickel-steel counterpart contacts on the inside. I told you, this mouse is going to be thinking when the last human being on the last known planet is dead. And it's going to be thinking about that girl. Forever."

"Forever is an awfully long time," said the first technician, with a shiver. "We only need a safety period of two thousand years. The girl herself would spoil in less than a thousand years, if anything did go wrong."

"Never you mind," said Tiga-belas, "that girl is going to be guarded whether she is spoiled

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or not." He spoke to the cube. "You're going along with Veesey, fellow, and if she is an *Old Twenty-two* you'll turn the whole thing into a toddle-garden frolic complete with ice cream and hymns to the West Wind." Tiga-belas looked up at the other men and said, quite unnecessarily, "He can't hear me."

"Of course not," said the first technician, very dryly.

They all looked at the cube. It was a beautiful piece of engineering. The psychological guard had reason to be proud of it.

"Do you need the mouse any more?" said the first technician.

"Yes," said Tiga-belas. "One-third of a millisecond at forty megadynes. I want him to get her whole life printed on his left cortical lobe. Particularly her screams. She screamed badly at ten months. Something she got in her mouth. She screamed at ten when she thought the air had stopped in her drop-shaft. It hadn't, or she wouldn't be here. They're in her record. I want the mouse to have those screams. And she had a pair of red shoes for her fourth birthday. Give me the full two minutes with her. I've printed the key on the complete series of *Marcia and the Moon Men* — that was the best box drama for teen-age girls that they ran last year. Veesey saw it. This time she'll see it again, but the mouse will be tied in. She won't have the chance of a snowball in hell of forgotting it."

SAID THE first technician, "What was that?"

"Huh?" said Tiga-belas.

"What was that you just said, that, at the end?"

"Are you deaf?"

"No," said the technician huffily. "I just didn't understand what you meant."

"I said that she would not have the chance of a snowball in hell of forgetting it."

"That's what I thought you said," replied the technician. "What is a snowball? What is hell? What sort of chances do they make?"

The second technician interrupted eagerly. "I know," he explained. "Snowballs are ice formations on Neptune. Hell is a planet out near Khufu VII. I don't know how anybody would get them together."

Tiga-belas looked at them with the weary amazement of the very old. He did not feel like explaining, so he said gently:

"Let's leave the literature till another time. All I meant was, Veesey will be safe when she's cued into this mouse. The mouse will outlast her and everybody else, and no teen-age girl is going to forget *Marcia and the Moon Men.* Not when she saw

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every single episode twice over. This girl did."

"She's not going to render the other passengers ineffectual? That wouldn't help," said the first technician.

"Not a bit," said Tiga-belas.

"Give me those strengths again," said the first technician.

"Mouse — one-third millisecond at forty megadynes."

"They'll hear that way beyond the moon," said the technician. "You can't put that sort of stuff into people's heads without a permit. Do you want us to get a special permit from the Instrumentality?"

"For one-third of a millisecond?"

The two men faced each other for a moment; then the technician began creasing his forehead, his mouth began to smile and they both laughed. The second technician did not understand it and Tiga-belas said to him:

"I'm putting the girl's whole lifetime into one-third of a millisecond at top power. It will drain over into the mouse-brain inside this cube. What is the normal human reaction within one-third millisecond?"

"Fifteen milliseconds —" The second technician started to speak and stopped himself.

"That's right," said Tiga-belas. "People don't get anything at all in less than fifteen milliseconds. This mouse isn't only veneered and laminated; *he's fast.* The lamination is faster than his own synapses ever were. Bring on the girl."

The first technician had already gone to get her.

The second technician turned back for one more question. "Is the mouse dead?"

"No. Yes. Of course not. What do you mean? Who knows?" said Tiga-belas all in one breath.

THE YOUNGER man stared but the couch with the beautiful girl had already rolled into the room. Her skin had chilled down from pink to ivory and her respiration was no longer visible to the naked eye, but she was still beautiful. The deep freezing had not yet begun.

The first technician began to whistle. "Mouse — forty megadynes, one-third of a millisecond. Girl, output maximum, same time. Girl input, two minutes, what volume?"

"Anything," said Tiga-belas. "Anything. Whatever you use for deep personality engraving."

"Set," said the technician.

"Take the cube," said Tiga-belas.

The technician took it and fitted it into the coffin-like box near the girl's head.

"Good-bye, immortal mouse," said Tiga-belas, "think about the

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beautiful girl when I am dead and don't get too tired of *Marcia and the Moon Men* when you've seen it for a million years . . ."

"Record," said the second technician. He took it from Tiga-belas and put it into a standard drama-shower, but one with output cables heavier than any home had ever installed.

"Do you have a code word?" said the first technician.

"It's a little poem," said Tiga-belas. He reached in his pocket. "Don't read it aloud. If any of us misspoke a word, there is a chance she might hear it and it would heterodyne the relationship between her and the laminated mouse."

The two looked at a scrap of paper. In clear, archaic writing there appeared the lines:

Lady if a man
Tries to bother you, you can
Think blue,
Count two,
And look for a red shoe.

The technicians laughed warmly. "That'll do it," said the first technician.

Tiga-belas gave them an embarrassed smile of thanks.

"Turn them both on," he said. "Good-by, girl," he murmured to himself. "Good-by, mouse. Maybe I'll see you in seventy-four years."

THE ROOM flashed with a kind of invisible light inside their heads.

In moon orbit a navigator wondered about his mother's red shoes.

Two million people on earth started to count "one-two" and then wondered why they had done so.

A bright young parakeet, in an orbital ship, began reciting the whole verse and baffled the crew as to what the meaning might be.

Apart from this, there were no side effects.

The girl in the coffin arched her body with terrible strain. The electrodes had scorched the skin at her temples. The scars stood bright red against the chilled fresh skin of the girl.

The cube showed no sign from the dead-live live-dead mouse.

While the second technician put ointment on Veesey's scars, Tiga-belas put on a headset and touched the terminals of the cube very gently without moving it from the snap-in position it held in the coffin-shaped box.

He nodded, satisfied. He stepped back.

"You're sure the girl got it?"

"We'll read it back before she goes to deep-freeze."

"*Marcia and the Moon Men*, what?"

"Can't miss it," said the first technician. "I'll let you know if

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there's anything missing. There won't be."

Tiga-belas took one last look at the lovely, lovely girl. Seventy-three years, two months, three days, he thought to himself. And she, beyond Earth rules, may be awarded a thousand years. And the mouse-brain has got a million years.

Veesey never knew any of them — neither the first technician, nor the second technician, nor Tiga-belas, the psychological guard.

To the day of her death, she knew that *Marcia and the Moon Men* had included the most wonderful blue lights, the hypnotic count of "one-two, one two" and the prettiest red shoes that any girl had seen on or off earth.

III

THREE hundred and twenty-six years later she had to wake up.

Her box had opened.

Her body ached in every muscle and nerve.

The ship was screaming emergency and she had to get up.

She wanted to sleep, to sleep, or to die.

The ship kept screaming.

She had to get up.

She lifted an arm to the edge of her coffin-bed. She had practiced getting in and out of the bed in the long training period, before they sent her underground to be hypnotized and frozen. She knew just what to reach for, just what to expect. She pulled herself over on her side. She opened her eyes.

The lights were yellow and strong. She closed her eyes again.

This time a voice sounded from somewhere near her. It seemed to be saying, "Take the straw in your mouth."

Veesey groaned.

The voice kept on saying things.

Something scratchy pressed against her mouth.

She opened her eyes.

The outline of a human head had come between her and the light.

She squinted, trying to see if it might be one more of the doctors. No, this was the ship.

The face came into focus.

It was the face of a very handsome and very young man. His eyes looked into hers. She had never seen anyone who was both handsome and sympathetic, quite the way that he was. She tried to see him clearly, and found herself beginning to smile.

The drinking-tube thrust past her lips and teeth. Automatically she sucked at it. The fluid was something like soup, but it had a medicinal taste too.

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The face had a voice. "Wake up," he said, "wake up. It doesn't do any good to hold back now. You need some exercise as soon as you can manage it."

She let the tube slip from her mouth and gasped, "Who are you?"

"Trece," he said, "and that's Talatashar over there. We've been up for two months, re-cueing the robots. We need your help."

"Help," she murmured, "my help?"

Trece's face wrinkled and crinkled in a delightful grin. "Well, we sort of needed you. We really do need a third mind to watch the robots when we think we've fixed them. And besides, we're lonely. Talatashar and I aren't much company to each other. We looked over the list of reserve crew and we decided to wake you." He reached out a friendly hand to her.

When she sat up she saw the other man, Talatashar. She immediately recoiled: she had never seen anyone so ugly. His hair was gray and cropped. Piggy little eyes peered out of eye-sockets which looked flooded with fat. His cheeks hung down in monstrous jowls on either side. On top of all that, his face was lop-sided. One side seemed wide-awake but the other was twisted in an endless spasm which looked like agony. She could not help putting her hand to her mouth. And it was with the back of her hand against her lips that she spoke.

"I thought — I thought everybody on this ship was supposed to be handsome."

One side of Talatashar's face smiled at her while the other half stayed with its expression of frozen hurt.

"We were," his voice rumbled, and it was not of itself an unpleasant voice, "we all were. Some of us always get spoiled in the freezing. It will take you a while to get used to me." He laughed grimly. "It took *me* a while to get used to me. In two months, I've managed. Pleased to meet you. Maybe you'll be pleased to meet me, after a while. What do you think of that, eh, Trece?"

"What?" said Trece, who had watched them both with friendly worry.

"The girl. So tactful. The direct diplomacy of the very young. Was I handsome, she said. No, say I. What is she, anyhow?"

Trece turned to her. "Let me help you sit," he said.

SHE SAT up on the edge of her box.

Wordlessly he passed the skin of fluid to her with its drinking

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tube, and she went back to sucking her broth. Her eyes peered up at the two men like the eyes of a small child. They were as innocent and troubled as the eyes of a kitten which has met worry for the first time.

"What are you?" said Trece.

She took her lips away from the tube for a moment. "A girl," she said.

Half of Talatashar's face smiled a sophisticated smile. The other half moved a little with muscular drag, but expressed nothing. "We see that," said he, grimly.

"He means," said Trece conciliatorily, "what have you been trained for?"

She took her mouth away again. "Nothing," said she.

The men laughed — both of them. First, Talatashar laughed with all the evil in the world in his voice. Then Trece laughed, and he was too young to laugh his own way. His laughter, too, was cruel. There was something masculine, mysterious, threatening and secret in it, as though he knew all about things which girls could find out only at the cost of pain and humiliation. He was as alien, for the moment, as man have always been from women: filled with secret motives and concealed desires, driven by bright sharp thoughts which women neither had nor wished to have. Perhaps more than his body had spoiled.

There was nothing in Veesey's own life to make her fear that laugh, but the instinctive reaction of a million years of womanhood behind her was to disregard the evil, go on the alert for more trouble and hope for the best at the moment. She knew, from books and tapes, all about sex. This laugh had nothing to do with babies or with love. There was contempt and power and cruelty in it — the cruelty of men who are cruel merely because they are men. For an instant she hated both of them, but she was not alarmed enough to set off the trigger of the protective devices which the psychological guard had built into her mind itself. Instead, she looked down the cabin, ten meters long and four meters wide.

This was home now, perhaps forever. There were sleepers somewhere, but she did not see their boxes. All she had was this small space and the two men — Trece with his warm smile, his nice voice, his interesting gray-blue eyes; and Talatashar, with his ruined face. And their laughter. That wretchedly mysterious masculine laughter, hostile and laughing-at in its undertones.

"Life's life," she thought, "and I must live it. Here."

Talatashar, who had finished

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laughing, now spoke in a very different voice.

"There will be time for the fun and games later. First, we have to get the work done. The photonic sails aren't picking up enough starlight to get us anywhere. The mainsail is ripped by a meteor. We can't repair it, not when it's twenty miles across. So we have to jury-rig the ship — that's the right old word."

"How does it work?" asked Veesey sadly, not much interested in her own question. The aches and pains of the long freeze were beginning to bedevil her.

Talatashar said, "It's simple. The sails are coated. We were put into orbit by rockets. The pressure of light is bigger on one side than on the other. With some pressure on one side and virtually no pressure on the other, the ship has to go somewhere. Interstellar matter is very fine and does not give us enough drag to slow us down. The sails pull away from the brightest source of light at any time. For the first eighty years it was the sun. Then we began trying to get both the sun and some bright patches of light behind it. Now we have more light coming at us than we want, and we will be pulled away from destination if we do not point the blind side of the sails at the goal and the pushing sides at the next best source. The sailor died, for some reason we can't figure out. The ship's automatic mechanism woke us up and the navigation board explained the situation to us. Here we are. We have to fix the robots."

"But what's the matter with them? Why don't they do it themselves? Why did they have to wake up people? They're supposed to be so smart." She particularly wondered, why did they have to wake up *me?* But she suspected the answer — that the men had done it, not the robots — and she did not want to make them say it. She still remembered how their masculine laughter had turned ugly.

"The robots weren't programmed to tear up sails — only to fix them. We've got to condition them to accept the damage that we want to leave, and to go ahead with the new work which we are adding."

"Could I have something to eat?" asked Veesey.

"Let me get it!" cried Trece.

"Why not?" said Talatashar.

While she ate, they went over the proposed work in detail, the three of them talking it out calmly. Veesey felt more relaxed. She had the sensation that they were taking her in as a partner.

By the time they completed their work schedules, they were

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sure it would take between thirty-five and forty-two normal days to get the sails stiffened and re-hung. The robots did the outside work, but the sails were seventy thousand miles long by twenty thousand miles wide.

Forty-two days!

THE WORK was not forty-two days at all.

It was one year and three days before they finished.

The relationships in the cabin had not changed much. Talatashar left her alone except to make ugly remarks. Nothing he had found in the medicine cabinet had made him look any better, but some of the things drugged him so that he slept long and well.

Trece had long since become her sweetheart, but it was such an innocent romance that it might have been conducted on grass, under elms, at the edge of an Earth-side silky river.

Once she had found them fighting and had exclaimed:

"Stop it! Stop it! You can't!"

When they did stop hitting each other, she said wonderingly:

"I thought you *couldn't*. Those boxes. Those safeguards. Those things they put in with us."

And Talatashar said, in a voice of infinite ugliness and finality, "That's what *they* thought. I threw those things out of the ship months ago. Don't want them around."

The effect on Trece was dramatic, as bad as if he had walked into one of the Ancient Unselfing Grounds unaware. He stood utterly still, his eyes wide and his voice filled wth fear when, at last, he did speak.

"So — that's — why — we — fought!"

"You mean the boxes? They're gone, all right."

"But," gasped Trece, "each was protected by each one's box. We were all protected — from ourselves. God help us all!"

"What is God?" said Talatashar.

"Never mind. It's an old word. I heard it from a robot. But what are we going to do? What are *you* going to do?" said he accusingly to Talatashar.

"Me," said Talatashar, "I'm doing nothing. Nothing has happened." The working side of his face twisted in a hideous smile.

Veesey watched both of them.

She did not understand it, but she feared it, that unspecific danger.

Talatashar gave them his ugly, masculine laugh, but this time Trece did not join him. He stared open-mouthed at the other man.

Talatashar put on a show of courage and indifference. "Shift's up," he said, "and I'm turning in."

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Veesey nodded and tried to say good night but no words came. She was frightened and inquisitive. Of the two, feeling inquisitive was worse. There were thirty-odd thousand people all around her, but only these two were alive and present. They knew something which she did not know.

Talatashar made a brave show of it by bidding her, "Mix up something special for the big eating tomorrow. Mind you do it, girl."

He climbed into the wall.

WHEN VEESEY turned toward Trece, it was he who fell into her arms.

"I'm frightened," he said. "We can face anything in space, but we can't face us. I'm beginning to think that the sailor killed himself. *His* psychological guard broke down too. And now we're all alone with just us."

Veesey looked instinctively around the cabin. "It's all the same as before. Just the three of us, and this little room, and the Up-and-Out outside."

"Don't you see it, darling?" He grabbed her by the shoulders. "The little boxes protected us from ourselves. And now there aren't any. We are helpless. There isn't anything here to protect us from us. What hurts man like man? What kills people like people? What danger to us could be more terrible than ourselves?"

She tried to pull away: "It's not that bad."

Without answering he pulled her to him. He bagan tearing at her clothes. The jacket and shorts, like his own, were omnitextile and fitted tight. She fought him off but she was not the least bit frightened. She was sorry for him, and at this moment the only thing that worried her was that Talatashar might wake up and try to help her. That would be too much.

Trece was not hard to stop.

She got him to sit down and they drifted into the big chair together.

His face was as tear-stained as her own.

That night, they did not make love.

In whispers, in gasps, he told her the story of *Old Twenty-two.* He told her that people poured out among the stars and that the ancient things inside people woke up, so that the deeps of their minds were more terrible that the blackest depth of space. Space never committed crimes. It just killed. Nature could transmit death, but only man could carry crime from world to world. Without the boxes, they looked into the bottomless depths of their own unknown selves.

She did not really understand,

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but she tried as well as she possibly could.

He went to sleep — it was long after his shift should have ended — murmuring over and over again:

"Veesey, Veesey, protect me from me! What can I do now, now, now, so that I won't do something terrible later on? What *can* I do? *Now* I'm afraid of me, Veesey, and afraid of *Old Twenty-two.* Veesey, Veesey, you've got to save me from me. What can I do now, now, now . . .?"

She had no answer and after he slept, she slept. The yellow lights burned brightly on them both. The robot-board, reading that no human being was in the "on" position, assumed complete control of the ship and sails.

Talatashar woke them in the morning.

No one that day, nor any of the succeeding days, said anything about the boxes. There was nothing to say.

But the two men watched each other like unrelated beasts and Veesey herself began watching them in turn. Something wrong and vital had come into the room, some exuberance of life which she had never known existed. It did not smell; she could not see it; she could not reach it with her fingers. It was something real, nevertheless. Perhaps it was what people once called *danger.*

She tried to be particularly friendly to both the men. It made the feeling diminish within her. But Trece became surly and jealous and Talatashar smiled his untruthful lopsided smile.

IV

DANGER CAME to them by surprise.

Talatashar's hands were on her, pulling her out of her own sleeping-box.

She tried to fight but he was as remorseless as an engine.

He pulled her free, turned her around and let her float in the air. She would not touch the floor for a minute or two, and he obviously counted on getting control of her again. As she twisted in the air, wondering what had happened, she saw Trece's eyes rolling as they followed her movement. Only a fraction of a second later did she realize that she saw Trece too. He was tied up with emergency wire, and the wire which bound him was tied to one of the stanchions in the wall. He was more helpless than she.

A cold deep fear came upon her.

"Is this a crime?" she whispered to the empty air. "Is this

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what crime is, what you are doing to me?"

Talatashar did not answer her, but his hands took a firm terrible grip on her shoulders. He turned her around. She slapped at him. He slapped her back, hitting so hard that her jaw felt like a wound.

She had hurt herself accidentally a few times; the doctor-robots had always hurried to her aid. But no other human being had ever hurt her. Hurting people — why, that wasn't done, except for the games of men! It wasn't done. It couldn't happen. It did.

All in a rush she remembered what Trece had told her about *Old Twenty-two,* and about what happened to people when they lost their own outsides in space and began making up evil from the people-insides which, after a million and more years of becoming human, still followed them everywhere — even into space itself.

This was crime come back to man.

She managed to say it to Talatashar, "You are going to commit crimes? On this ship? With me?"

His expression was hard to read, with half of his face frozen in a perpetual rictus of unfulfilled laughter. They were facing each other now. Her face was feverish from the pain of his slap, but the good side of his face showed no corresponding imprint of pain from having been struck by her. It showed nothing but strength, alertness and a kind of attunement which was utterly and unimaginably wrong.

At last he answered her, and it was as if he wandered among the wonders of his own soul.

"I'm going to do what I please. What *I* please. Do you understand?"

"Why don't you just ask us?" she managed to say. "Trece and I will do anything you want. We're all alone in this little ship, millions of miles from nowhere. Why shouldn't we do what you want? Let him go. And talk to me. We'll do what you want. Anything. You have rights too."

His laugh was close to a crazy scream.

He put his face close to her and hissed at her so sharply that droplets of his spittle sprayed against her cheek and ear.

"I don't want rights!" he shouted at her. "I don't want what's mine. I don't want to do right. Do you think I haven't heard the two of you, night after night, making soft loving sounds when the cabin has gone dark. Why do you think I threw the cubes out of the ship? Why do you think I needed power?"

"I don't know," she said, sadly

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and meekly. She had not given up hope. As long as he was talking he might talk himself out and become reasonable again. She had heard of robots blowing their circuits, so that they had to be hunted down by other robots. But she had never thought that it might happen to people too.

Talatashar groaned. The history of man was in his groan — the anger at life, which promises so much and gives so little, and despair about time, which tricks man while it shapes him. He sat back on the air and let himself drift toward the floor of the cabin, where the magnetic carpeting drew the silky iron filaments in their clothing.

"You're thinking he'll get over this, aren't you?" said he, speaking of himself.

She nodded.

"You're thinking he'll get reasonable and let both of us alone, aren't you?"

She nodded again.

"You're thinking — Talatashar, he'll get well when we arrive at Wereld Schemering, and the doctors will fix his face, and then we'll all be happy again. That's what you're thinking, isn't it?"

She still nodded. Behind her she heard Trece give a loud groan against his gag, but she did not dare take her eyes off Talatashar and his spoiled, horrible face.

"WELL, IT won't be that way, Veesey," he said. The finality in his voice was almost calm.

"Veesey, you're not going to get there. I'm going to do what I have to do. I'm going to do things to you that no one ever did in space before, and then I'm going to throw your body out the disposal door. But I'll let Trece watch it all before I kill him too. And then, do you know what I'll do?"

Some strange emotion — it was probably fear—began tightening the muscles in her throat. Her mouth had become dry. She barely managed to croak, "No, I don't know what you'll do then . . ."

Talatashar looked as though he were staring inward.

"I don't either," said he, "except that it's not something I want to do. I don't want to do it at all. It's cruel and messy and when I get through I won't have you and him to talk to. But this is something I have to do. It's justice, in a strange way. You've got to die because you're bad. And I'm bad too; but if you die, I won't be so bad."

He looked up at her brightly, almost as though he were normal. "Do you know what I'm

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talking about? Do you understand any of it?"

"No. No. No." Veesey stammered, but she could not help it.

Talatashar stared not at her but at the invisible face of his crime-to-come and said, almost cheerfully:

"You might as well understand. It's you who will die for it, and then him. Long ago you did me a wrong, a dirty, intolerable wrong. It wasn't the you who's sitting here. You're not big enough or smart enough to do anything as awful as the things that were done to me. It wasn't this you who did it, it was the real, true you instead. And now you are going to be cut and burned and choked and brought back with medicines and cut and choked and hurt again, as long as your body can stand it. And when your body stops, I'm going to put on an emergency suit and shove your dead body out into space with him. He can go out alive, for all I care. Without a suit, he'll last two gasps. And then part of my justice will be done. That's what people have called crime. It's just justice, private justice that comes out of the deep insides of man. Do you understand, Veesey?"

She nodded. She shook her head. She nodded again. She didn't know how to respond.

"And then there are more things which I'll have to do," he went on, with a sort of purr. "Do you know what there is outside this ship, waiting for my crime?"

She shook her head, and so he answered himself.

"There are thirty thousand people following in their pods behind this ship. I'll pull them in by two and two and I will get young girls. The others I'll throw loose in space. And with the girls I'll find out what it is — what it is I've always had to do, and never knew. Never knew, Veesey, till I found myself out in space with you."

His voice almost went dreamy as he lost himself in his own thoughts. The twisted side of his face showed its endless laugh, but the mobile side looked thoughtful and melancholy, so that she felt there was something inside him which might be understood, if only she had the quickness and the imagination to think of it.

HER THROAT still dry, she managed to half-whisper at him:

"Do you hate me? Why do you want to hurt me? Do you hate girls?"

"I don't hate girls," he blazed, "I hate *me*. Out here in space I found it out. You're not a person. Girls aren't people. They are soft and pretty and cute and cud-

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dly and warm, but they have no feelings. I was handsome before my face spoiled, but that didn't matter. I always knew that girls weren't people. They're something like robots. They have all the power in the world and none of the worry. Men have to obey, men have to beg, men have to suffer, because they are built to suffer and to be sorry and to obey. All a girl has to do is to smile her pretty smile or to cross her pretty legs, and the man gives up everything he has ever wanted and fought for, just to be her slave. And then the girl —" and at this point he got to screaming again, in a high shrill shout — "and then the girl gets to be a woman and she has children, more girls to pester men, more men to be the victims of girls, more cruelty and more slaves. You're so cruel to me, Veesey! You're so cruel that you don't even know you're cruel. If you'd known how I wanted you, you'd have suffered like a person. But you didn't suffer. You're a girl. Well, you're going to find out now. You will suffer and then you will die. But you won't die until you know how men feel about women."

"Tala," she said, using the nickname they had so rarely used to him, "Tala, that's not so. I never meant you to suffer."

"Of course you didn't," he snapped. "Girls don't know what they do. That's what makes them girls. They're worse than snakes, worse than machines." He was mad, crazy-mad, in the outer deep of space. He stood up so suddenly that he shot through the air and had to catch himself on the ceiling.

A noise in the side of the cabin made them both turn for a moment. Trece was trying to break loose from his bonds. It did no good. Veesey flung herself toward Trece, but Talatashar caught her by the shoulder. He twisted her around. His eyes blazed at her out of his poor, misshapen face.

Veesey had sometimes wondered what death would be like. She thought:

This is it.

Her body still fought Talatashar, there in the spaceboat cabin. Trece groaned behind his shackles and his gag. She tried to scratch at Talatashar's eyes, but the thought of death made her seem far away. Far away, inside herself.

Inside herself, where other people could not reach, ever — no matter what happened.

Out of that deep nearby remoteness, words came into her head:

Lady if a man
Tries to bother you, you can

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Think blue,
Count two,
And look for a red shoe . . .

Thinking blue was not hard. She just imagined the yellow cabin lights turning blue. Counting "one-two" was the simplest thing in the world. And even with Talatashar straining to catch her free hand, she managed to remember the beautiful, beautiful red shoes which she had seen in *Marcia and the Moon Men.*

The lights dimmed momentarily and a huge voice roared at them from the control board.

"Emergency, top emergency! People! People out of repair!"

Talatashar was so astonished that he let her go.

The board whined at them like a siren. It sounded as though the computer had become flooded with weeping.

In an utterly different voice from his impassioned talkative rage, Talatashar looked directly at her and asked, very soberly, "Your cube. Didn't I get your cube too?"

There was a knocking on the wall. A knocking from the millions of miles of emptiness outside. A knocking out of nowhere.

A person they had never seen before stepped into the ship, walking through the double wall as though it had been nothing more than a streamer of mist.

It was a man. A middle-aged man, sharp of face, strong in torso and limbs, clad in very old-style clothes. In his belt he had a whole collection of weapons, and in his hand a whip.

"You there," said the stranger to Talatashar, "untie that man."

He gestured with the whip-butt toward Trece, still bound and gagged.

Talatashar got over his surprise.

"You're a cube-ghost. You're not real!"

The whip hissed in the air and a long red welt appeared on Talatashar's wrist. The drops of blood began to float beside him in the air before he could speak again.

Veesey could say nothing; her mind and body seemed to be blanking out.

As she sank to the floor, she saw Talatashar shake himself, walk over to Trece and begin untying the knots.

When Talatashar got the gag out of Trece's mouth, Trece spoke — not to him, but to the stranger:

"Who are you?"

"I do not exist," said the stranger, "but I can kill you, any of you, if I wish. You had better do as I say. Listen carefully. You too," he added, turning half-way around and looking at Veesey,

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"you listen too, because it's you who called me."

ALL THREE listened. The fight was gone out of them. Trece rubbed his wrists and shook his hands to get the circulation going in them again.

The stranger turned, in courtly and elegant fashion, so that he spoke most directly to Talatashar.

"I derive from the young lady's cube. Did you notice the lights dim? Tiga-belas left a false cube in her freezebox but he hid me in the ship. When she thought the key notions at me, there was a fraction of a microvolt which called for more power at my terminals. I am made from the brain of some small animal, but I bear the personality and the strength of Tiga-belas. I shall last a billion years. When the current came on full power, I became operative as a distortion in your minds. I do not exist," said he, specifically addressing himself to Talatashar, "but if I needed to take out my imaginary pistol and to shoot you in the head with it, my control is so strong that your bone would comply with my command. The hole would appear in your head and your blood and your brains would pour out, just as much as blood is pouring from your hand just now. Look at your hand and believe me, if you wish."

Talatashar refused to look.

The stranger went on in a very deliberate tone. "No bullet would come from my pistol, no ray, no blast, nothing. Nothing at all. But your flesh would believe me, even if your thoughts did not. Your bone structure would believe me, whether you thought so or not. I am communicating to every separate single cell in your body, to everything which I feel to be alive. If I think *bullet* at you, your bone will pull aside for the imaginary wound. Your skin will part, your blood will pour out, your brains will splash. They will not do it by physical force but by communication from me. Communication direct, you fool. That may not be real violence, but it serves my purpose just as well. Now do you understand me? Look at your wrist."

Talatashar did not avert his eyes from the stranger. In an odd cold voice he said, "I believe you. I guess I am crazy. Are you going to kill me?"

"I don't know," said the stranger.

Trece said, "Please, are you a person or a machine?"

"I don't know," said the stranger to him too.

"What's your name?" asked Veesey. "Did you get a name

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when they made you and sent you with us?"

"My name," said the stranger, with a bow to her, "is Sh'san."

"Glad to meet you, Sh'san," said Trece, holding out his own hand.

They shook hands.

"I felt your hand," said Trece. He looked at the other two in amazement. "I felt his hand, I really did. What were you doing out in space all this time?"

The stranger smiled, "I have work to do, not talk to make."

"What do you want us to do," said Talatashar, "now that you've taken over?"

"I haven't taken over," said Sh'san, "and you will do what you have to do. Isn't that the nature of people?"

"But, please —" said Veesey.

The stranger had vanished and the three of them were alone in the spaceboat cabin again. Trece's gag and bindings had finally drifted down to the carpet but Tala's blood hung gently in the air beside him.

Very heavily, Talatashar spoke, "Well, we're through that. Would you say I was crazy?"

"Crazy?" said Veesey. "I don't know the word."

"Damaged in the thinking," explained Trece to her. Turning to Talatashar he began to speak seriously, "I think that —" He was interrupted by the control board. Little bells rang and a sign lighted up. They all saw it. *Visitors expected,* said the glowing sign.

The storage door opened and a beautiful woman came into the cabin with them. She looked at them as though she knew them all. Veesey and Trece were inquisitive and startled, but Talatashar turned white, dead white.

V

VEESEY SAW that the woman wore a dress of the style which had vanished a generation ago — a style now seen only in the story-boxes. There was no back to it. The lady had a bold cosmetic design fanning out from her spinal column. In front, the dress hung from the usual magnet tabs which had been inserted into the shallow fatty area of the chest, but in her case the tabs were above the clavicles, so that the dress rose high, with an air of old-fashioned prudishness. Magnet tabs were at the usual place just below the rib-cage, holding the half-skirt, which was very full, in a wide sweep of unpressed pleats. The lady wore a necklace and matching bracelet of off-world coral. The lady did not even look at Veesey. She went straight to Talatashar and spoke to him with peremptory love:

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"Tal, be a good boy. You've been bad."

"Mama," gasped Talatashar. "Mama, you're dead!"

"Don't argue with me," she snapped. "Be a good boy. Take care of the little girl. Where is the little girl?" She looked around and saw Veesey. "That little girl," she added, "be a good boy to *that* little girl. If you don't, you will break your mother's heart, you will ruin your mother's life, you will break your mother's heart, just like your father did. Don't make me tell you twice."

She leaned over and kissed him on the forehead, and it seemed to Veesey that both sides of the man's face were equally twisted, for that moment.

She stood up, looked around, nodded politely at Trece and Veesey, and walked back into the storage room, closing the door after her.

Talatashar plunged after her, opening the door with a bang and shutting it with a slam. Trece called after him:

"Don't stay in there too long. You'll freeze."

Trece added, speaking to Veesey, "This is something your cube is doing. That Sh'san, he's the most powerful warden I ever saw. Your psychological guard must have been a genius. And you know what's the matter with *him?*" He nodded at the closed door. "He told me once, just in general. His own mother raised him. He was born in the asteroid belt and she didn't turn him in."

"You mean, his very own mother?" said Veesey.

"Yes, his genealogical mother," said Trece.

"How *dirty!*" said Veesey. "I never heard of anything like it."

Talatashar came back into the room and said nothing to either of them.

The mother did not reappear.

But Sh'san, the eidetic man imprinted in the cube, continued to assert his authority over all three of them.

THREE DAYS later Marcia herself appeared, talked to Veesey for half an hour about her adventures with the Moon Men, and then disappeared again. Marcia never pretended that she was real. She was too pretty to be real. A thick cascade of yellow hair crowned a well-formed head; dark eyebrows arched over vivid brown eyes, and an enchantingly mischievous smile pleased Veesey, Trece, and Talatashar. Marcia admitted that she was the imaginary heroine of a dramatic series from the story-boxes. Talatashar had calmed down completely after the apparition of Sh'san followed by that of his mother. He seemed

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anxious to get to the bottom of the phenomena. He tried to do it by asking Marcia.

She answered his questions willingly.

"What are you?" he demanded. The friendly smile on the good side of his face was more frightening than a scowl would have been.

"I'm a little girl, silly," said Marcia.

"But you're not real," he insisted.

"No," she admitted, "but are you?" She laughed a happy girlish laugh — the teen-ager tying up the bewildered adult in his own paradox.

"Look," he persisted, "you know what I mean. You're just something that Veesey saw in the story-boxes and you've come to give her imaginary red shoes."

"You can feel the shoes after I've left," said Marcia.

"That means the cube has made them out of something on this ship," said Talatashar, very triumphantly.

"Why not?" said Marcia. "I don't know about ships. I guess he does."

"But even if the shoes are real, you're not," said Talatashar. "Where do you go when you 'leave' us?"

"I don't know," said Marcia. "I came here to visit Veesey. When I go away I suppose that I will be where I was before I came."

"And where was that?"

"Nowhere," said Marcia, looking solid and real.

"Nowhere? So you admit you're nothing?"

"I will if you want me to," said Marcia, "but this conversation doesn't make much sense to me. Where were you before you were here?"

"Here? You mean in this boat? I was on earth," said Talatashar.

"Before you were in this universe, where were you?"

"I wasn't born, so I didn't exist."

"Well," said Marcia, "it's the same with me, only a little bit different. Before I existed I didn't exist. When I exist, I'm here. I'm an echo out of Veesey's personality and I'm helping her to remember that she is a pretty young girl. I feel as real as you feel. So there!"

Marcia went back to talking about her adventures with the Moon Men and Veesey was fascinated to hear all the things they had had to leave out of the story-box version. When Marcia was through, she shook hands with the two men, gave Veesey a little peck of a kiss on her left cheek and walked through the hull into the gnawing emptiness of space, marked only by the

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starless rhomboids of the sails, which cut off part of the heavens from view.

Talatashar pounded his fist in his other, open hand. "Science has gone too far. They will kill us with their precautions."

Trece said, deadly calm: "And what might you have done?"

Talatashar fell into a gloomy silence.

And on the tenth day after the apparitions began, they ended. The power of the cube drew itself into a whole thunderbolt of decision. Apparently the cube and the ship's computers had somehow filled in each other's data.

THE PERSON who came in this time was a space captain, gray, wrinkled, erect, tanned by the radiation of a thousand worlds.

"You know who I am," he said.

"Yes, sir, a captain," said Veesey.

"I don't know you," said Talatashar, "and I'm not sure I believe in you."

"Has your hand healed?" asked the captain, grimly.

Talatashar fell silent.

The captain called them to attention. "Listen. You are not going to live long enough to get to the stars on your present course. I want Trece to set the macrochronography for intervals of ninety-five years, and then I want to watch while he gives two of you at a time five years on watch. That will do to set the sails, check the tangling of the pod lines, and send out report beacons. This ship should have a sailor, but there is not enough equipment to turn one of you into a sailor, so we'll have to take a chance on the robot controls while all three of you sleep in your freezebeds. Your sailor died of a blood clot and the robots pushed him out of the cabin before they woke you —"

Trece winced. "I thought he had committed suicide."

"Not a bit," said the captain. "Now listen. You'll get through in about three sleeps if you obey orders. If you don't, you'll never get there."

"It doesn't matter about me," said Talatashar, "but this little girl has got to get to Wereld Schemering while she still has some life. One of your blasted apparitions told me to take care of her, but the idea is a good one, anyhow."

"Me too," said Trece. "I didn't realize that she was just a kid until I saw her talking to that other kid Marcia. Maybe I'll have a daughter like her some day."

The captain said nothing to these comments but gave them

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the full, happy smile of an old, wise man.

An hour later they were through with the check-up of the boat. The three were ready to go to their separate freezebeds. The captain was getting ready to make his farewell.

Talatashar spoke up, "Sir, I can't help asking it, but who are you?"

"A captain," said the captain promptly.

"You know what I mean," said Tala wearily.

The captain seemed to be looking inside himself. "I am a temporary, artificial personality created out of your minds by the personality which you call Sh'san. Sh'san is on the ship, but hidden from you, so that you will do him no harm. Sh'san was imprinted with the personality of a man, a real man, by the name of Tiga-belas. Sh'san was also imprinted with the personalities of five or six good space officers, just in case those skills might be needed. A small amount of static electricity keeps Sh'san on the alert, and when he is in the right position, he has a triggering mechanism which can call for more current from the ship's supply."

"But what *is* he? What *are* you?" Talatashar kept on, almost pleading. "I was about to commit a terrible crime and you ghosts came in and saved me. Are you imaginary? Are you real?"

"That's philosophy. I'm made by science. I wouldn't know," said the captain.

"Please," said Veesey, "could you tell us what it seems like to you? Not what it is. What it seems like."

The captain sagged, as though the discipline had gone out of him —as though he suddenly felt terribly old. "When I'm talking and doing things, I suppose that I feel about like any other space captain. If I stop to think about it, I find myself pretty upsetting. I know that I'm just an echo in your minds, combined with the experience and wisdom which has gone into the cube. So I guess that I do what real people do. I just don't think about it very much. I mind my business." He stiffened and straightened and was himself again. "My own business," he repeated.

"And Sh'san," said Trece, "how do you feel about him?"

A look of awe — almost a look of terror — came upon the captain's face. "He? Oh, him." The tone of wonder enriched his voice and made it echo in the small cabin of the spaceboat: "Sh'san. He is the thinker of all thinking, the 'to be' of being, the doer of doings. He is powerful

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beyond your strongest imagination. He makes me come living out of your living minds. In fact," said the captain with a final snarl, "he is a dead mouse-brain laminated with plastic and I have no idea at all of who *I* am. Good night to you all!"

The captain set his cap on his head and walked straight through the hull. Veesey ran to a viewport but there was nothing outside the ship. Nothing. Certainly no captain.

"What can we do," said Talatashar, "but obey?"

They obeyed. They climbed into their freezebeds. Talatashar attached the correct electrodes to Veesey and to Trece before he went to his bed and attached his own. They called to each other pleasantly as the lids came down.

They slept.

VI

AT DESTINATION, the people of Wereld Schemering did the ingathering of pods, sails and ship themselves. They did not wake the sleepers till they had them all assured of safety on the ground.

They woke the three cabin mates together. Veesey, Trece, and Talatashar were so busy answering questions about the dead sailor, about the repaired sails and about their problems on the trip that they did not have time to talk to each other. Veesey saw that Talatashar seemed to be very handsome. The port doctors had done something to restore his face, so that he seemed a strangely dignified young-old man. At last Trece had a chance to talk to her.

"Good-by, kid," he said. "Go to school for a while here and then find yourself a good man. I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?" she said, a terrible fear rising within her.

"For smooching around with you before that trouble came. You're just a kid. But you're a good kid." He ran his fingers through her hair, turned on his heel and was gone.

She stood, utterly forlorn, in the middle of the room. She wished that she could weep. What use had she been on the trip?

Talatashar had come up to her unnoticed.

He held out his hand. She took it.

"Give it time, child," said he.

Is it *child* again? she thought to herself. To him she said, politely, "Maybe we'll see each other again. This is a pretty small world."

His face lit up in an oddly agreeable smile. It made such a wonderful difference for the pa-

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ralysis to be gone from one side. He did not look old at all, not really old.

His voice took on urgency. "Veesey, remember that I remember. I remember what almost happened. I remember what we thought we saw. Maybe we did see all those things. We won't see them on the ground. But I want you to remember this. You saved us all. Me too. And Trece, and the thirty thousand out behind."

"Me?" she said. "What did I do?"

"You tuned in help. You let Sh'san work. It all came through you. If you hadn't been honest and kind and friendly, if you hadn't been terribly intelligent, no cube could have worked. That wasn't any dead mouse working miracles on us. It was your mind and your own goodness that saved us. The cube just added the sound effects. I tell you, if you hadn't been along, two dead men would be sailing off into the Big Nothing with thirty thousand spoiling bodies trailing along behind. You saved us all. You may not know how you did it, but you did."

An official tapped him on the arm; Tala said, firmly but politely, to him: "Just a moment.

"That's it, I guess," he said to her.

A contrary spirit seized her; she had to speak, though she risked unhappiness by talking. "And what you said about girls . . . then . . . that time?"

"I remember it." His face twisted almost back to its old ugliness for a moment. "I remember it. But I was wrong. Wrong."

She looked at him and she thought in her own mind about the *blue* sky, about the *two* doors behind them, and about the *red shoes* in her luggage. Nothing miraculous happened. No Sh'san, no voices, no magic cubes.

EXCEPT THAT he turned around, came back to her and said, "Look. Let's make sure that we see each other next week. These people at the desk can tell us where we are going to be, so that we'll find each other. Let's pester them."

Together they went to the immigration desk.

— CORDWAINER SMITH

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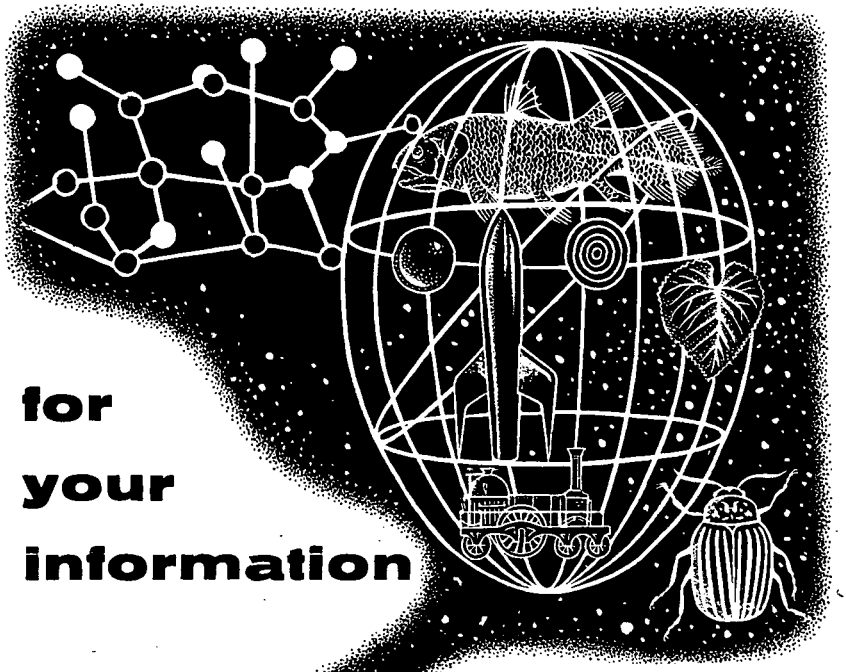

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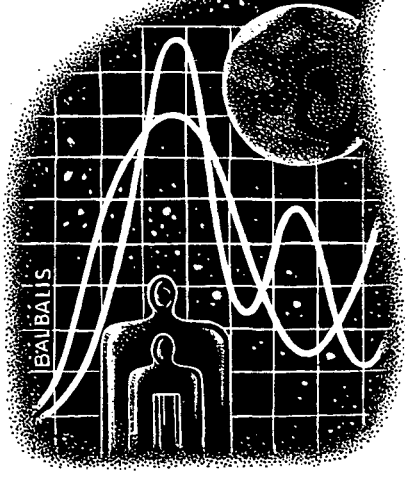

BY WILLY LEY

FIRST FLIGHT BY ROCKET POWER

A FRIEND of mine who teaches aeronautical engineering is in the habit of giving a question to his students at the end of the last class of the day. They then have 24 hours to think about this question, or to check what sources of information they have. He then has them discuss their own answers for some fifteen minutes the next day.

Recently the topic was the question of who was the first man

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Rocket motor for what was expected to be the first man-carrying rocket.

to fly by rocket power, and so he asked me to be present at the discussion. A most interesting discussion it was. The first student to state his opinion said that the first flight by rocket power was that of Commander Alan B. Shepard, Jr. He had come supplied with the date, May 5, 1961 and with the information that the range covered was 302 miles and the peak altitude had been 116.5 miles.

Another student said that Yuri Gagarin had flown earlier. He did not know the date (it was April 12, 1961) but he was sure that it had been before Shepard's sub-orbital flight. Almost immediately the fur began to fly. One student was positive, because of some "confidential newsletter" to which his father subscribed, that Gagarin did not orbit the earth at all. Another student said that the first Russian orbital flight must have been preceded by a Russian sub-orbital flight, or several, and that it seemed likely to him that either Gagarin or Titov, or both, had been in such a sub-orbital flight.

Still another student pointed out that the Japanese Kamikaze pilots had flown by rocket power, while another one said that he remembered having read about a German woman pilot having test-flown a rocket-propelled airplane. That, he said, must have been earlier than the Kamikaze flights. One student held out for a German by the name of Otto Fischer who made a rocket flight before the war. I was not supposed to supply any answers but I thought it proper to interrupt at this point and to say that their instructor was interested in actual flights and not in hoaxes.

The students settled their debate by agreeing that the first rocket-powered flight had taken place somewhere in Germany sometime between the first and second World Wars. Then class began and I went home and busied myself with my files —

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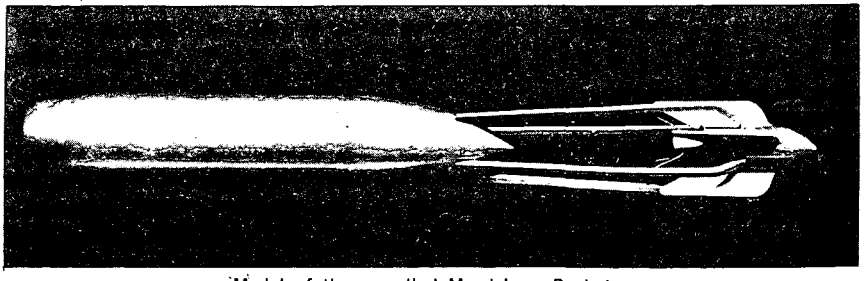
checking up on my own memory, so to speak.

ONE of the problems is, of course, how the term "flight by rocket power" is defined. It could be restricted to mean ballistic flight like the sub-orbital flights of Shepard and Grissom, or it can be extended to mean aerodynamic flight with propulsion by rockets. If the extended definition is used the first flight by rocket power was carried out by Friedrich Stamer on June 11, 1928 in the Rhön Mountains in West Germany.

The flight was the outcome of the experiments with rocket-propelled racing cars which had been carried out earlier during the same year by the automobile manufacturer Fritz von Opel, with rockets manufactured by Friedrich Wilhelm Sander. (They were still blackpowder rockets of the traditional composition, but compressed by means of a hydraulic press for greater power.) At that time motorless flight was a widespread hobby in Germany — as a sport. (Later it had military overtones.)

There were two customary methods of getting a glider into the air. One was the car-tow: a car, being driven rapidly along a convenient road, got the glider into the air in the same manner in which a running boy gets his kite into the air. This method was not used much in Germany because the glider camps were in hilly areas where a car, if it could be driven at all, had to stay below 20 m.p.h. and could not follow a straight line for more than a dozen yards. The second method was by means of a rubber rope, stretched taut by the combined efforts of from eight to twenty strong young men. The result was a catapult-like action. The advantages were that it was cheap and that the rubber rope could be easily carried. The disadvantage was that you could not take off unless there were at



Model of the so-called Magdeburg Rocket.

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least six other husky young men around.

The leading society of glider enthusiasts, the *Rhön-Rossitten Gesellschaft*—the name was derived from the geographical names of their two camps—began to wonder about rockets for take-off. They approached Opel for financial assistance and a number of rockets of different size and thrust were bought from Sander. After a number of rocket powered flights of models had been attempted (with poor results because the rockets were too powerful) the main event came: the flight of a manned glider powered by Sander rockets. Eventually the rockets were to provide the power for take-off, but for the first try it had been decided to take off by means of the customary rubber rope.

The glider was a so-called duck, where the control surfaces are arranged ahead of the pilot and the main wings so that a casual observer might think that the thing is flying backwards. A glider of this type was chosen because the rockets could be attached to the fuselage without any worries as to what the exhaust blast might do to the tail assembly. Two rockets were attached to the fuselage. They had a thrust of 44 lbs. each, and the ignition system was rigged in such a manner that only one of them could be ignited at a time. The burning time of the rockets was 30 seconds.

Since all this was new to everybody concerned it is not surprising that the pilot, Friedrich Stamer, was nervous. Everybody else was nervous too, even the photographers—as evidenced by the fact that no good picture was taken. At the first attempt the crew even fumbled the rope. Stamer thought he was in the air and ignited one rocket; but he was *not* in the air and the rocket just burned out. At the second attempt the glider did get into the air and one rocket was ignited. But Stamer had trouble balancing. He did not ignite the second rocket but landed instead, only 700 feet from his take-off point.

The third try was successful. While being flung into the air by the rubber rope, Stamer ignited the first rocket and flew about 200 yards in a straight line, climbing slightly. Then he made a curve of about 45° to the right and flew straight again for 300 yards. After that he made another turn to the right. Immediately after this turn the rocket burned out and he ignited the second. He flew in a straight line for 500 yards, made a 30° turn to the right, flew another 200 yards and landed, a second or two before the rocket burned out.

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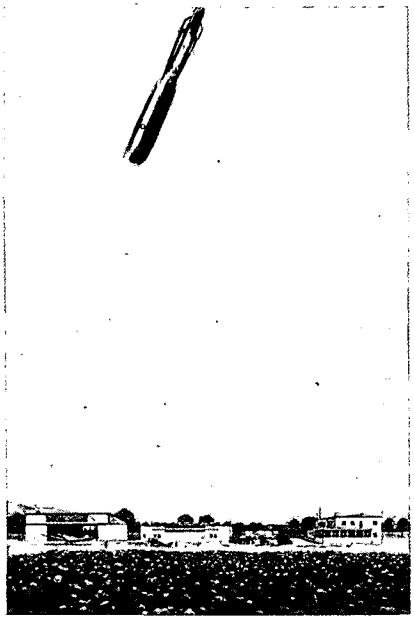

THE POSTCARD THAT CAUSED THE HOAX

This postcard was manufactured and distributed by a Madgeburg firm. It was to be sold as a souvenir of the planned ascent of the so-called Magdeburg Pilot Rocket.

Inscription in the back reads: Aufstieg der. ersten semannten Rakete, der Magdeburger Pilotenrakete. Sonntag nach Pfingsten 1933.

Translation: Ascent of the first manned rocket, the Magdeburg Pilot Rocket, Sunday after Pentecost, 1933.

The London paper which published the story of the so-called Fischer Ascent from Rügen might have drawn upon the "evidence" of that postcard.

The fourth try was a failure; the rocket exploded one or two seconds after ignition and set the plane afire. Stamer landed as fast as he could and immediately after landing the second rocket caught fire. Fortunately it did not explode. The pilot escaped unharmed, though the glider was severely damaged. And nobody felt inclined to repeat the experiment.

ALL the details of this first rocket flight are known because Friedrich Stamer and Alexander Lippisch reported on it in an engineering journal. Unfortunately almost no detail is known about the second rocket-powered flight, made by Fritz von Opel on September 30, 1929. Opel never wrote a report for an engineering journal, the reporters present lacked understanding of the experiment and the archives of Opel's company burned up during the war so that a reader who inquired about the flight was told by the company that they couldn't even say whether the plane used was a monoplane or a biplane. (It was a monoplane, as I remember from press photographs which appeared at the time.)

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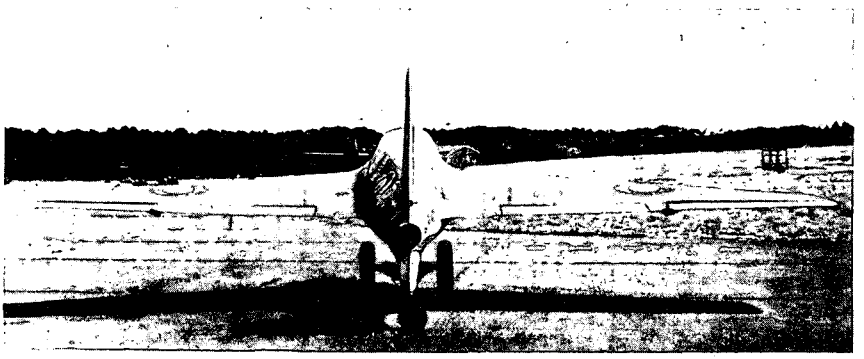
Fritz von Opel's flight was somewhat superior to Stamer's flight because there was no take-off help. The rockets did all the work. At the time I kept a kind of a journal; the pertinent passage reads, in translation:

> In the meantime Opel had had a rocket airplane built which he tested for the first time on September 30, 1929 at the airport of Frankfurt am Main. It was a glider with the center of gravity as close to the nose as could be done. It was to take off from a gently inclined ramp which was 25 meters (ca. 82 feet) in length. During the first two attempts the plane landed not far beyond the end of the ramp, even though several rockets had ignited.
>
> The third test took place in the afternoon of the same day and was a success. The glider which, pilot included, had a take-off weight of 275 kilograms (ca. 600 lbs.) lifted off the ramp and performed a low-altitude flight lasting a little less than a quarter of an hour. Maximum speed was 150 kilometers per hour (ca. 93 m.p.h.) and when it landed the speed was still close to 100 kilometers per hour (ca. 62 m.p.h.) which caused damage, as did the fact that the fabric caught fire.

Opel also did not feel like repeating.

The next item, in chronological order, is the so-called Fischer hoax which is still believed by a number of people, including some old-time science fiction readers.



Messerschmitt Me-163, on ground prior to test flight.

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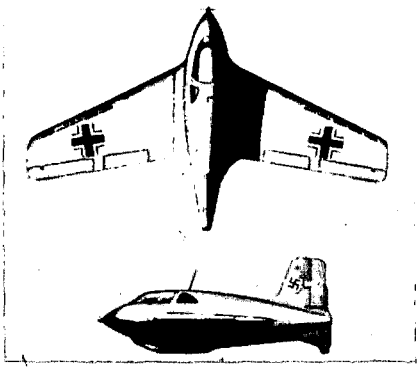


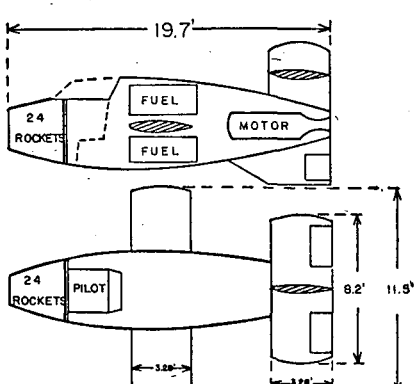
Messerschmitt Me-163B.

In this country it appeared in Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories* (March 1934), where an extract from a Boston newspaper was reprinted. It also appeared in the magazine *Popular Aviation* (same date); all the articles going back to one original source, the *Sunday Referee*, published in London. The date was November 5, 1933. The *Sunday Referee* pretended to have obtained an eye-witness story of a secret demonstration on the island of Rügen in the Baltic which had taken place just a few days earlier. The inventor of the rocket was called Bruno Fischer, the flight was said to have been made by his brother Otto Fischer.

The rocket was described as being 24 feet tall and built of steel. After Otto Fischer had crawled into the rocket through a small steel door, "Bruno Fischer and the three officials then retired to a small hollow in the ground about two hundred yards away, and Fischer closed the switch that sent the rocket on its journey."

Now, while reading the "eye-witness description" which I am going to quote, I want you to recall the take-offs of Glenn and Carpenter which you, no doubt, watched on TV:

> There was a blinding flash and a deafening explosion and the slim torpedo-shaped body was gone from the steel framework in which it had rested. A few minutes later it came into sight again, floating nose upwards from a large parachute that had au-



Natter ("Viper"), outline sketch based on interrogations.

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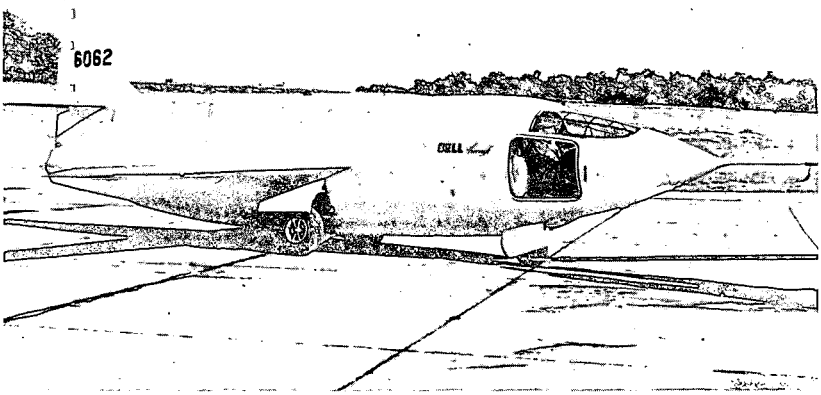

Rocket airplane Bell X-1. (Courtesy of U.S. Air Force)

tomatically been released when it had begun to descend. As it drifted nearer the steel fins on the outside of the body could be seen moving as its pilot manipulated the rocket so that it would land on the island.

Wonderful description, isn't it? The man-carrying rocket jumps out of the framework with such an acceleration that it simply vanishes. Later on in the report it was stated that "the initial explosion propelled the rocket for 200 yards . . . it had beeen driven the remainder of the distance by the rockets in its tail which had been released automatically at timed intervals." And later on the pilot can select the landing site for the rocket, which is dangling from a parachute, by moving its tail fins.

By now everybody knows that a take-off just doesn't look that way. In 1933 it was different. But to anybody who knew anything about rockets the story was a crude hoax, and a few of the early members of the British Interplanetary Society wrote to the editor, pointing out the inconsistencies. I did, too. But the editors replied evasively. I can understand that they would not like to admit that they had hoaxed the public, but they could have said that they had been hoaxed them-

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selves. At any event, the *Sunday Referee* never printed a retraction.

The story was later reinforced by a journalist named W. J. Makin (who, I am told, died during the war) in the May, 1935 issue of *Nash's Pall Mall Magazine* where Makin told at length how he visited the proving ground of the German Society for Space Travel and met Otto Fischer and Willy Ley. The interesting point is that, at the time of Makin's alleged visit, the proving ground had been shut for nearly two years and I lived in New York City, not Berlin. I can't help recalling the old joke about the provincial visitor to a picture gallery in Moscow, where the visitor points to a portrait labelled Krassilnikoff and asks the guard what Comrade Krassilnikoff had done. The guard replied that he had been a great inventor; he had invented a steam turbine, short-wave radio and television. The visitor nodded in satisfaction and pointed to the portrait next to it, labeled Koloviev. The guard obliged by saying that Koloviev was an even greater inventor than Krassilnikoff. Why? Because he invented Krassilnikoff.

What I mean to say is that, though Bruno Fischer allegedly invented the rocket, I suspect Mr. Makin of having been the greater inventor who invented Bruno Fischer.

ONE reason why the story was so readily believed was that, early in 1933, there had been a by no means secret attempt at a manned rocket flight, sponsored by the City of Magdeburg. The plan was to send a man up in a liquid fuel rocket. The occasion was to be a city-wide holiday in memory of Otto von Guericke, the inventor of the airpump who had been Bürgermeister of Madgeburg. Since a large crowd was expected the flight was to be no higher than about half a mile. The public was supposed to see what took place. At the peak of the flight the man in the rocket was to bail out, releasing the rip cord for another parachute while he jumped so that both rider and rocket would return with separate parachutes.

The design for the rocket was that the liquid fuel rocket motor was to pull the rocket. The upper part of the rocket body was occupied by the fuel tanks and the parachute compartment, while the rider sat in the bottom section, his own parachute strapped to his back.

The manned flight—announced for "Sunday after Pentecost, 1933," which was June 11 of that year — never took place. The problem was the usual one. The

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promised funds were not forthcoming. Bad weather, which warped the wooden launching rack for a quarter-size model, ruined a demonstration, and the contracting, or rather contracted, parties parted with mutual recriminations.

But before they started shouting at each other a picture postcard to commemorate the event, had been printed. I wonder whether that postcard was the germ for the Fischer hoax.

During the years from 1936 to 1939 a series of test flights of rocket-powered aircraft took place in Germany which have remained virtually unknown. Of course they were secret at the time.

Early in 1936 the rocket section of the Weapons Department of the German army had developed a liquid fuel rocket motor with a thrust of 650 lbs. The Junkers aircraft company had supplied them with the fuselage of a small airplane known as the *Junkers Junior*. The rocket motor was installed and a static test was run. "As we wished to develop more powerful motors and build them into aircraft," General Walter Dornberger wrote later, "we had to study the acceleration and behavior of the equipment when flying curves. For that purpose we built a large centrifuge, measuring about 50 feet. One end of the rotating steel frame carried the pilot's seat, braking equipment and a newly developed controllable power plant of 2200 lbs. thrust. The other end of the frame carried a counterweight."

As the rocket motor whirled the whole around, the man in the pilot's seat experienced accelerations up to 5 g. In the words of Dornberger he got down "happy; though somewhat dazed." His name was Wernher von Braun.

This motor was then installed in a Heinkel He-112. This was a single-engine model. The engine was not removed; the rocket motor was installed as an auxiliary power plant in the tail. The fuel tanks held enough fuel for 90 seconds burning. Captain Warsitz made two or three successful test flights, but during one flight it seemed to him as if his plane had caught fire and he made an emergency landing. It had only been smoking insulation, but the landing damaged the plane so badly that it could not be flown again. The first plane to use rocket power only was the Heinkel He-112. Its rocket motor had fuel for 120 seconds of continuous firing. Again there were a few successful flights, ending in a catastrophe. The pilot lost control — quite some time after the rocket had ceased burning — and crashed. This was in 1939.

In Spring of 1940 the Russians

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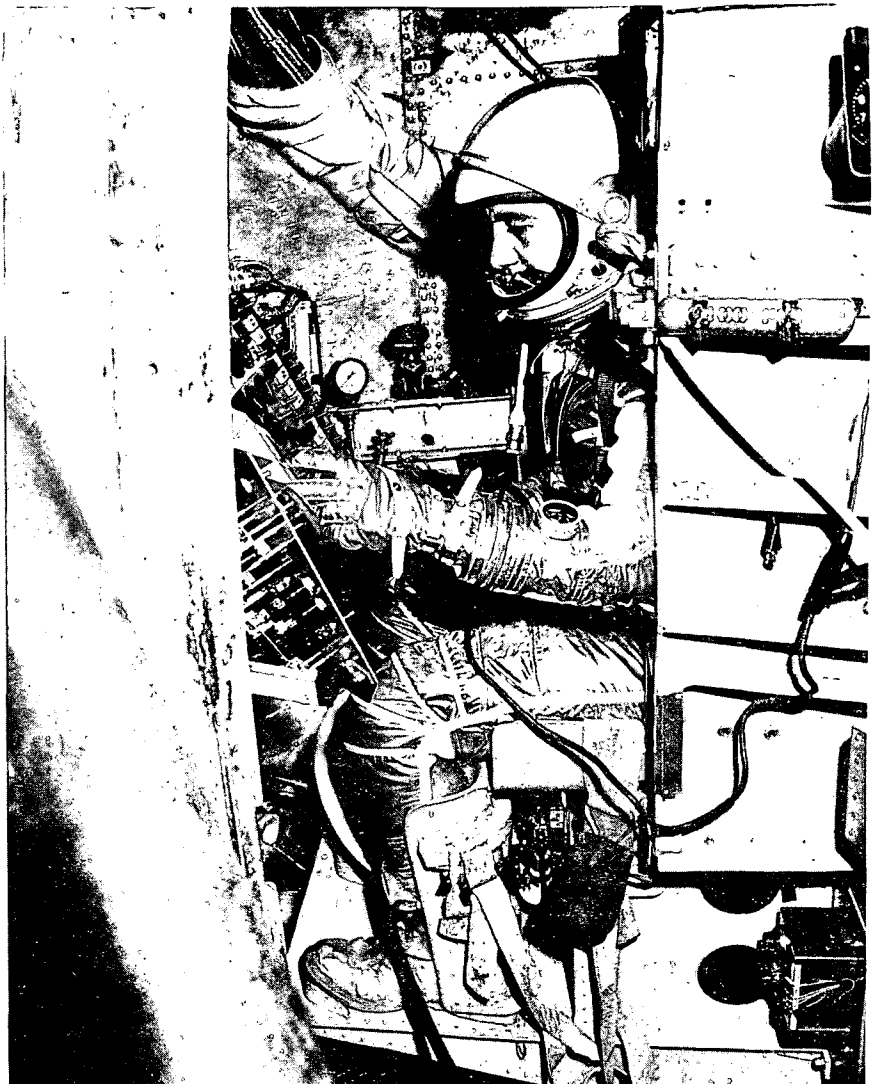

Astronaut Grissom in training (centrifuge) for sub-orbital flight.

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flew a single-seater airplane propelled by a liquid fuel rocket motor. But all we know is that such a flight took place and that the rocket motor had been built by an engineer Friedrich Arturovitch Zander (his parents had been natives of Latvia). We don't know how long the plane stayed in the air, how high it went or even precisely where this test flight took place.

THE NEXT rocket-propelled airplane was German again; it was the Messershmitt Me-163 which had the unusual distinction that the pilot who made the test flights was Hanna Reitsch. (She also made the test flights of the piloted version of the V-1 buzz bomb.) The airplane itself had been designed by Alexander Lippisch, who had been active during the very first rocket powered flight. It was tailless and shed its undercarriage after takeoff to land on a retractable keel. The first thing Hanna Reitsch had to do was to sit in the pilot's seat while the rocket motor went through a full-duration static test run. She had to get used to the noise. But during the test flight the undercarriage somewhat caught, and while it hanged it failed to drop off. Hanna Reitsch carried the test flight through just the same; but instead of landing she crashed, suffering a very complicated skull fracture in several places. However, she arrived and we know everything that happened from her own autobiography.

The disastrous flight took place in October 1942.

And in spite of the first failure an improved version of the Me-163 became operational.

By 1944 the situation had deteriorated so much for the Germans that they were willing to try really unorthodox things. Of these the interceptor *Natter* ("viper") progressed farthest, but did not become operational like the Me-163B. The *Natter* was to be built of ordinary lumber and the cheapest grade of steel, for it was to be a one-shot weapon. It was to take off vertically with the aid of solid fuel boosters. Then, when at intercept altitude, the liquid-fuel rocket motor was to take over as what is now called a sustainer engine. The nose compartment held 24 rockets which were to be fired against formation of bombers as a salvo. Then the nose was to drop off and the pilot was to jump, in the process releasing another parachute which salvaged the liquid-fuel rocket motor. The remainder of the *Natter* was expendable; it was to be left to crash.

A number of flights without power were made to test the aerodynamic characteristics. On

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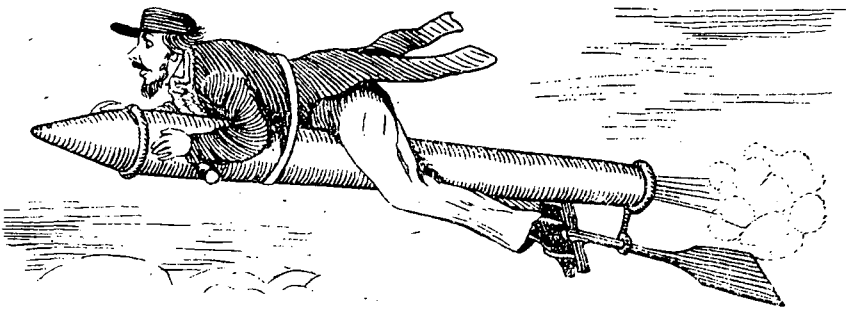

Russian cartoon drawn in 1880. (From the collection of A. A. Rodnykh, original source unknown.)

March 1, 1945 an SS pilot by the name of Sieber made the first powered take-off. It ended badly. At about 500 feet altitude the cockpit cover fell off and the plane turned over, but kept climbing, in upside-down position, at an angle of about 15° to 5000 feet. There the fuel supply gave out. The plane turned over and dived into the ground.

I have in my files a photostatic copy of a report written for the files of the SS relating to this flight. The man who wrote it states that pilot Sieber must have been "befuddled" since he did nothing to try to straighten out the flight, and did not even attempt to bail out. What is more likely is that pilot Sieber's neck was broken the moment the cockpit cover fell off, since the headrest was part of the cover.

The first rocket-propelled research airplane after the war was, as is well known, the Bell X-1. This was the first plane to fly faster than sound — on October 14, 1947, with Captain Charles E. Yeager at the controls.

From then on the record is clear. The X-1 was followed by the X1A and the X-2. The Douglas *Skyrocket* also flew faster than sound, and then the X-15 program was begun.

Parallel to the development of winged research aircraft the plans for orbital flights with wingless rockets slowly matured. Again there is no doubt about the dates: one earth orbit flown by Yuri Gagarin in *Vostok I* on April 12, 1961. First sub-orbital flight by Alan B. Shepard in Mercury capsule *Freedom VII* on May 5, 1961. The second sub-

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orbital flight by Virgil I. Grissom in Mercury capsule *Liberty Bell VII* on July 21, 1961. Then one day in orbit (17 orbits) by Gherman Titov in *Vostok II* on August 6, 1961.

And then the orbital flights, three orbits each, of John H. Glenn in Mercury capsule *Friendship VII* on February 20, 1962 and of Malcolm S. Carpenter in Mercury capsule *Aurora VII* on May 25, 1962, followed in August, 1962 by the Russian "double flight."

There is just one more point that should be discussed.

Our astronauts were preceded in orbit by the chimpanzee Enos. And before an American made a sub-orbital flight the chimpanzee Ham made one. Did the Russians make any manned sub-orbital flights? Discounting rumors — which have a market value of about three cents each—the answer is: apparently not. Of course, they had rockets big enough to carry a man. For example on July 2, 1959 a Russian rocket carried a payload of 4400 lbs. to an altitude of more than 200 miles. The payload included several dogs and other animals, all of which were recovered safely. So they did perform sub-orbital flights with animals. They also performed orbital flights with animals and subsequent recovery. But apparently they jumped from sub-orbital and orbital flights with animals directly to a manned orbital flight.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Of course I know, from the ads on the back cover of *Galaxy*, that there are various European editions of *Galaxy*. But has there been indigenous science fiction in Europe, not counting the British Isles?

Aaron Mandelblatt
Brooklyn, N. Y.

The answer is "yes," but it needs a little explanation. The two well known European science-fiction writers were, of course, H. G. Wells in England and Jules Verne in France — although it always surprises science-fiction fans if they are told that for both these men their science-fiction output was far less than fifty per cent of their total output. Jules Verne wrote a large number of travel stories without any science-fiction element or very little of it. H. G. Wells, especially in his late years, wrote reams of what might be called "politics." But for both, their science-fiction tales have been their most durable works.

A third major science-fiction writer, closer to the present than Verne and the early Wells, was the German Hans Dominik. Of his thirty-odd books, most are

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science fiction. The ones that were not were popularizations of engineering problems and developments; Hans Dominik was an engineer before he started writing.

In addition to these writers with a considerable output of science-fiction stories there were literally dozens who wrote a science-fiction story occasionally.

As for the form of publication, it was normally in book form. The better known writers had their science fiction novels serialized in weekly magazines first, but their final aim was always a hard-cover book. Of course, many of the short pieces appeared in magazines, or in the Sunday editions of daily newspapers. Unless they were collected later in book form they are now impossible to find.

Which brings me to one rather surprising fact. The first science-fiction magazine before World War I was Russian. It began in about 1903, and its title was *Mir priklusheniya*, the "World of Adventures". The early issues, I have been told, consisted mainly of translations of Jules Verne, but with a sprinkling of Russian authors, one of whom was a lady specializing in interplanetary romances. The magazine still existed in 1923 (I have seen issues from that year) but it was apparently discontinued at a later date.

—WILLY LEY

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Comic Inferno

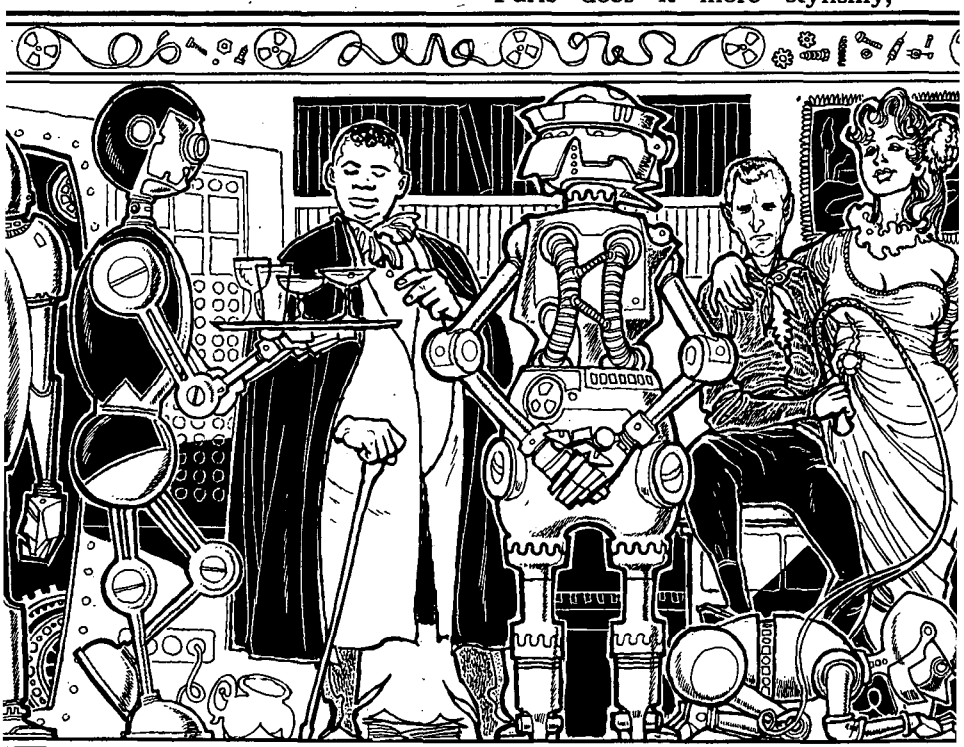
I

JANUARY Birdlip spread his hands characteristically.

"Well, I'm a liberal man, and that was a very liberal party," he exclaimed, sinking further back into the car seat. "How say you, my dear Freud? Are you suitably satiated?"

His partner, the egregious Freddie Freud, took some time to reply, mainly because of the bulky brunette who pinned him against the side of the car in a festive embrace. "Vershoye's parties are better than his books," he finally agreed.

"There isn't a publisher in Paris does it more stylishly,"



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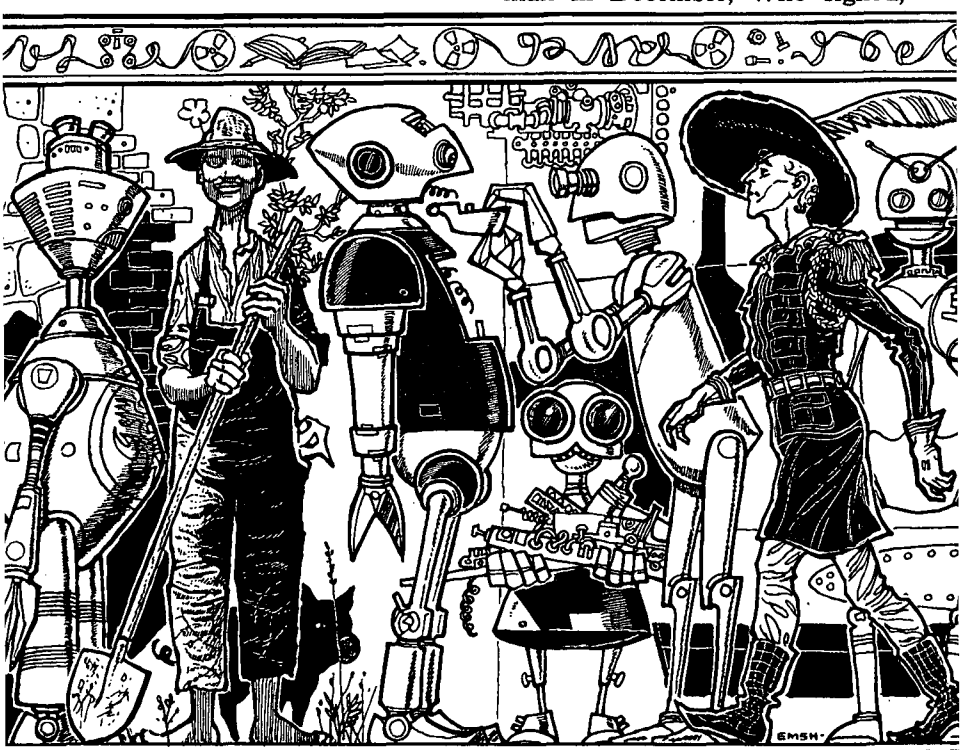
Every race needs a whipping boy. But can you alway be sure who's holding the whip?

By BRIAN W. ALDISS

Birdlip pursued. "And his new Twenty-Second Century Studies is a series well worth a stylish launching, think you not, friend Freddie?"

"This is no time for intellectual discussion. Don't forget we're only taking this as far as Calais." And with that, Freud burrowed back under his brunette with the avidity of a disturbed sexton beetle.

Not without envy, Birdlip looked over at his younger partner. Although he tried to fix his thoughts on the absent Mrs. Birdlip, a sense of loneliness overcame him. With tipsy solemnity he sang to himself, "There was a young man in December, Who sighed,



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'Oh I hardly remember, How the girls in July Used to kiss me and tie—'"

Moistening his lips, he peeped through the dividing glass at Bucket and Hippo, Freud's and his personal romen sitting in the front seats, at the dark French countryside slinking past, and then again at the brunette (How good was her English?), before softly intoning the rest of his song.

Then he started talking aloud, indifferent to whether Fred answered or not. It was the privilege of slightly aging cultural publishers to be eccentric.

"I found it consoling that Paris too has its robot and roman troubles. You heard Vershoye talking about the casino that was flooded because the robot fire engine turned up and extinguished a conflagration that did not exist? Always a crumb of comfort somewhere, my dear Freud. Nice to think of our French brothers sharing our sorrows! And your ample lady friend. Her robot driver drove her car through a news-vendor's stall—through stationary stationery, you almost might say—so that she had to beg a lift home from us, thus transforming her misfortune into your bonchance . . ."

But the word "misfortune" reminded him of his brother, Rainbow Birdlip. He sank into silence, the loneliness returning.

Ah, yes, ten—even five—years ago, Birdlip Brothers had been one of the most respected imprints in London. And then . . . it had been just after he had seen the first four titles of the Prescience Library through the press . . . Rainbow had changed overnight. Now he was outdoor farming near Maidstone, working in the fields with his hands. Like a blessed roman! Entirely without cultural or financial interests.

The thought choked January Birdlip. That brilliant intellect lost to pig farming! Trying to take refuge in drunkenness, he began to sing again.

BUT their limousine was slowing now, coming up to the outer Calais roundabout, where one road led into the city and the other onto the Channel Bridge. The robot driver pulled to a stop by the side of the road, where an all-night café armored itself with glaring lights against the first approach of dawn. Fred Freud looked up.

"Dash it, we're here already, toots!"

"Thank you for such a nice ride," said the brunette, shaking her anatomy into place and opening the side door. "You made me very comfortable."

"Mademoiselle, allow me to buy you a coffee before we part company for ever. And then I can

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write down your phone number. Shan't be five minutes, Jan." This last remark was thrown over Freud's left shoulder as he blundered speedily out after the girl.

He slammed the door reverberatingly With one arm round the girl, who looked, Birdlip thought, blousy in the bright lights, he disappeared into the café, where a roman awaited their orders.

"Well! Well, I never!" Birdlip exclaimed.

Really, Freud seemed to have no respect for seniority of age or position. For a heady moment, Birdlip thought of ordering the car to drive on. But beside the wheel sat Bucket and Hippo, silent because they were switched off, as most romen were during periods of long inactivity. The sight of them motionless there intimidated Birdlip into a similar inertia.

Diverting his anger, he began to worry about the Homing Device decision. But there again, Freddie Freud had had his way over his senior partner. It shouldn't be. No, the question must be reopened directly Freud returned. Most firms had installed homing devices by now. Freud would just have to bow to progress.

The minutes ticked by. Dawn began to nudge night apologetically in the ribs of cloud overhead. Fred Freud returned, waving the brunette a cheerful good-by as he hopped into the car again.

"Overblown figure," Birdlip said severely, to kill his partner's enthusiasm.

"Quite agree, quite agree," Freud agreed cheerfully, still fanning the air harder than a window cleaner as he protracted his farewells.

"Overblown figure—and cheap behavior."

"Quite agree, quite agree," Freud said again, renewing his exertions as the car drew off.

They accelerated so fast round the inclined feed road to the Bridge that Bucket and Hippo rattled together

"I regret I shall have to reverse my previous decision on the Homing Device matter," said Birdlip, switching to attack before Freud could launch any coarse remarks. "My nerves will not stand the sight of romen standing round non-functioning for hours when they are not needed. When we get back, I shall contact Rootes and ask them to fit the device into all members of our non-human staff."

FREUD'S reflexes, worn as they were by the stimulations of the previous few hours, skidded wildly in an attempt to meet this new line of attack.

"Into all—you mean—but look, Jan, let's discuss this matter—or

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rather let's rediscuss it, because I understood it was all settled—when we are less tired. Eh? How's that?"

"I am not tired. Nor do I wish to discuss it. I have an aversion to seeing our metal menials standing about lifeless for hours on end. They—well, to employ an archaism they give me the creeps. We will have the new device installed and they can go—go home. Get off the premises when not required."

"You realize that with some of the romen, the proofreaders, for instance, we never know when we are going to want them."

"*Then,* my dear Freud, then we employ the Homing Device and they return at once. It's the modern way of working. It surprises me that on this point you should be so reactionary."

"You're over-fond of that word, Jan. People have only to disagree with you to be called reactionary. The reason you dislike seeing robots around is simply because you feel guilty about man's dependence on slave machines. It may be a fashionable phobia, but it's totally divorced from reality. Robots have no feelings, if I may quote one of the titles on our list. And your squeamishness will involve us in a large capital outlay."

"Squeamishness! These arguments ad hominem lead nowhere, Freddie. Birdlip Brothers will keep up with the times. As publishers of that distinguished science-fiction classics series, The Prescience Library, Birdlip Brothers *must* keep up with the times, so there's an end on't."

They sped high over the sea towards the mist that hid the English coast. Averting his eyes from the panorama, Freud said feebly, "I'd really rather we discussed this when we were less tired."

"Thank you, I am not tired," January Birdlip said. And he closed his eyes and went to sleep just as a sickly cyclamen tint spread over the eastern cloudbank, announcing the sun. The great bridge with its thousand-foot spans turned straw color, in indifferent contrast to the gray chop of waves in the Channel below.

II

BIRDLIP sank into his chair. Hippo obligingly lifted his feet onto the desk.

"Thank you, Hippocrates. How kind. You know I named you after the robot in those rather comic tales by— ah— oh, dear, my memory. But still it doesn't matter, and I've probably told you that anyway."

"The tales were by the pseudonymous René Lafayette, sir,

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flourished circa 1950, sir, and yes, you had told me."

"Probably I had. All right, Hippo, stand back. Please adjust yourself so that you don't stand so close to me when you talk."

"At what distance should I stand, sir?"

Exasperatedly, he said, "Between one point five and two meters away." Romen had to have these silly precise instructions. Really it was no wonder he wanted the wretched things out of the way when they were not in use . . . which recalled him to the point. It was sixteen o'clock on the day after their return from Paris, and the Rootes Group man was due to confer on the immediate installation of homing devices. Freud ought to be in on the discussion, just to keep the peace.

"Nobody could say Freddie and I *quarrel*," Birdlip sighed. He pressed the fingertips of his left hand against the fingertips of his right and rested his nose on them.

"Pity about poor brother Rainbow though . . . Quite inexplicable. Such genius . . ."

Affectionately, he glanced over at the bookcase on his left, filled with the publications of Birdlip Brothers. In particular he looked at his brother's brainchild, The Prescience Library. The series was bound in half-aluminum with proxisonic covers that announced the contents to anyone who came within a meter of them while wearing any sort of metal about his person.

That was why the bookcase was now soundproofed. Before, it had been deafening with Hippo continually passing the shelves; the roman, with fifty kilos of metal in his entrails, had raised a perpetual bellow from the books. Such was the price of progress.

Again he recalled his straggling thoughts.

"Nobody could say Freddie and I quarrel, but our friendship is certainly made up of a lot of differences. Hippo, tell Mr. Freud I am expecting Gavotte of Rootes and trust he will care to join us. Tell him gin corralinas will be served. That should bring him along. Oh, and tell Pig Iron to bring the drink in now."

"Yessir."

Hippo departed. He was a model of the de Havilland "Governor" class, Series II MK viiA. He walked with the slack-jointed stance typical of his class, as if he had been hit smartly behind the knees with a steel baseball bat.

He walked down the corridor carefully in case he banged into one of the humans employed at Birdlip's. Property in London had become so cheap that printing and binding could be carried out on the premises; yet in the whole concern only six humans were employed. Still Hippo took care.

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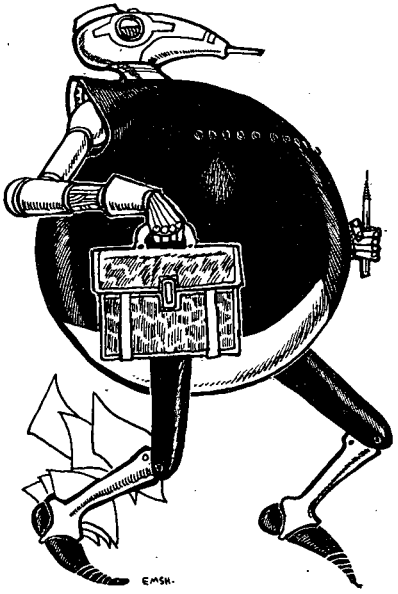

Care was bred into him, a man-made instinct.

AS he passed a table on which somebody had carelessly left a new publication, its proxisonic cover, beginning in a whisper, rising to a shout, and dying into a despairing moan as Hippo disappeared, said, "The Turkish annexation of the Suezzeus Canal on Mars in 2162 is one of the most colorful stories in the annals of Red Planet colonization, yet until now it has lacked a worthy historian. The hero of the incident was an Englishman ohhhh . . ."

Turning the corner, Hippo almost bumped into Pig Iron, a heavy forty-year-old Cunarder of the now obsolete "Expeditious" line. Pig Iron was carrying a tray full of drinks.

"I see you are carrying a tray full of drinks," Hippo said. "Please carry them in to Mr. Jan immediately."

"I am carrying them in to Mr. Jan immediately," said Pig Iron, without a hint of defiance; he was equipped with the old "Multi-Syllog" speech platters only.

As Pig Iron rounded the corner with the tray, Hippo heard a tiny voice gather volume to say ". . . annexation of the Suezzeus Canal on Mars in 2162 is one of the most colorful . . ." He tapped on Mr. Freud's door and put his metal head in.

Freud sprawled over an immense review list, with Bucket standing to attention at his side.

"Delete the Mercury *Mercury*—they've reviewed nothing since '72," he was saying as he looked up.

"Mr. Jan is expecting Gavotte of Rootes for a homing device discussion, sir, and trusts you will care to join. Gin corallinas will be served," Hippo said.

Freud's brow darkened.

"Tell him I'm busy. It was his idea. Let him cope with Gavotte himself."

"Yessir."

"And make it sound polite, you ruddy roman."

"Yessir."

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"Okay, get out. I'm busy."

"Yessir."

Hippo beat a retreat down the corridor, and a tiny voice broke into a shout of ". . . ish annexation of the Suezzeus Canal on Mars in 2162 . . ."

Meanwhile, Freud turned angrily to Bucket.

"You hear that, you tin horror? A man's going to come from one of the groups that manufactures your kind and he's going to tinker with you. And he's going to install a little device in each of you. And you know what that little device will do?"

"Yessir, the device of which you speak will—"

"Well, shuddup and listen while *I* tell *you*. You don't tell me, Bucket, *I* tell *you*. That little device will enable you plastic-placentaed power tools to go home when you aren't working! Isn't that wonderful? In other words, you'll be a little bit more like humans, and one by one these nasty little modifications will be fitted until finally you'll be just like humans. Oh, God, men are crazy! We're all crazy . . . Say something, Bucket."

"I AM not human, sir. I am a multipurpose roman manufactured by de Havilland, a member of the Rootes Group. I am 'Governor' class, Series II, Mk. II, chassis number A4437."

"Thank you for those few kind words."

Freud rose and began pacing up and down. He stared hard at the impassive machine. He clenched his fists and his tongue came unbidden between his teeth.

"You cannot reproduce, Bucket, can you?"

"No, sir."

"Why can't you?"

"I have not the mechanism for reproduction, sir."

"Nor can you practice sex, Bucket . . . Answer me, Bucket."

"You did not ask me a question, sir."

"You animated ore, agree with me!"

"I agree with you, sir."

"Good. That makes you just a ticking hunk of clockwork, doesn't it, Bucket? Can you hear yourself ticking, Bucket?"

"My auditory circuits detect the functioning of my own relays as well as the functioning of your heart and respiratory organs, sir."

Freud stopped behind his servant. His face was red; his mouth had spread itself over his face.

"I see I shall have to show you who is master again, Bucket. Get me the whip!"

Unhesitatingly, Bucket walked slack-kneed over to a wall cupboard. Opening it, he felt in the back and produced a long Afrikaans ox-whip that Freud had

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bought on a world tour several years ago. He handed it to his master.

Freud seized it and immediately lashed out with it, catching the roman round his legs so that he staggered. Gratified, Freud said, "How was that, eh?"

"Thank you, sir."

"I'll give you 'Thank you.' Bend over my desk!"

As the roman leaned forward across the review list, Freud lay to, planting the leather throng with a resonant precision across Bucket's back at regular fifteen-second intervals.

"Ah, you must feel that, whatever you pretend. Tell me you feel it!"

"I feel it, sir."

"Yes, well, you needn't think *you're* going to get a homing device and be allowed to go home . . . You're not human. Why should *you* enjoy the privileges of humanity?"

He emphasized his remarks with the whip. Each blow knocked the roman two centimeters along the desk, a movement Bucket always punctiliously corrected. Breathing heavily, Freud said, "Cry out with pain, blast you. I know it hurts!"

Punctiliously, Bucket began to imitate a cry of pain, making it coincide with the blows.

"My God, it's hot in here," said Freud, laying to.

"OH, dear, it's hot in here," said Birdlip, laying two plates of snacks on his desk. "Hippo, go and see what's the matter with the air-conditioning. I'm sorry, Mr. Gavotte; you were saying . . .?"

And he looked politely and not without fascination at the little man opposite him. Gavotte, even when sitting nursing a gin corallina, was never still. From buttock to buttock he shifted his weight, or he smoothed back a coif of hair, or brushed real and imaginary dandruff from his shoulders, or adjusted his tie. With a ballpoint, with a venier, and once with a comb, he tapped little tunes on his teeth. This he managed to do even while talking volubly.

It was a performance in notable contrast to the immobility of the new assistant roman that had accompanied him and now stood beside him awaiting orders.

"Eh, I was saying, Mr. Birdlip, how fashionable the Homing Device has become. Very fashionable. I mean, if you're not contemporary you're nothing. Firms all over the world are using them. And no doubt the fashion will soon spread to the system, although as you know on the planets there are far more robots than romen—simply because, I think, men are becoming tired of seeing their menials about all day, as you might say."

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"Exactly how I feel, Mr. Gavotte. I have grown very tired of seeing my—yes, yes, quite." Realizing that he was repeating himself, Birdlip closed that sentence down and opened up another. "One thing you have not explained. Just where do the romen go when they go home?"

"Oh, ha-ha, Mr. Birdlip, ha-ha, bles you, you don't have to worry about that, ha-ha," chuckled Gavotte, performing a quick obligato on his eye teeth. "With this little portable device with which we supply you, which you can carry around or leave anywhere according to whim, you just have to press the button and a circuit is activated in your roman that impells him to return at once to work immediately by the quickest route."

Taking a swift tonic sip of his gin, Birdlip said, "Yes, you told me that. But where do the romen go when they go away?"

Leaning forward, Gavotte spun his glass on the desk with his finger and said confidentially, "I'll tell you, Mr. Birdlip, since you ask. As you know, owing to tremendous population drops both here and elsewhere, and due to one or two factors too numerous to name, there are far less people about than there were."

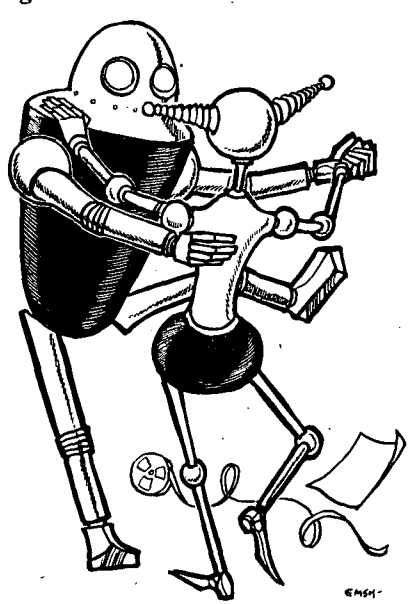
"That does follow."

"Quite so, ha-ha," agreed Gavotte, gobbling a snack. "So large sections of our big cities are now utterly deserted or unfrequented and falling into decay. This applies especially to London, where whole areas once occupied by artisans stand derelict. Now, my company has bought up one of these sections, called Paddington. No humans live there. So the romen can conveniently stack themselves in the old houses—out of sight and out of, ha-ha, harm."

Birdlip stood up.

"Very well, Mr. Gavotte. And your roman here is ready to start conversions straight away? He can begin on Hippocrates now, if you wish."

"Certainly, certainly! Delighted." Gavotte beckoned to the



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new and gleaming machine behind him. "This, by the way, is the latest model from one of our associates, Anglo-Atomic. It's the 'Fleetfeet,' with streamlined angles and heinleined joints. We've just had an order for a dozen—this is confidential, by the way, but I don't suppose it'll matter if I tell *you,* Mr. Birdlip—we've just had an order for a dozen from Buckingham Palace. Can I send you one on trial?"

"I'm fully staffed, thank you. Now if you'd like to start work . . . I have another appointment at seventeen-fifty."

III

"FIFTY, fifty-one, fifty-two. Fifty-two! What stamina he has!" exclaimed the RSPCR captain, Warren Pavment, to his assistant.

"He has finished now," said the assistant, a '71 AEI model called Toggle. "Do you detect a look of content and satisfaction on his face, Captain?"

Hovering in a copter over the Central area, man and roman peered into the tiny screen by their knees. On the screen, clearly depicted by their spycast, a tiny Freddie Freud collapsed into a chair, rested on his laurels, and gave a tiny Bucket the whip to return to the cupboard.

"You can stop squealing now," his tiny voice rang coldly in the cockpit.

"I don't think he looks content," the RSPCR captain said. "I think he looks unhappy—guilty even."

"Guilty is bad," Toggle said, as his superior spun the magnification. Freud's face gradually expanded, blotting out his body, filling the whole screen. Perspiration stood on his cheeks and forehead, each drop surrounded by its aura on the spycast.

"I'll bet that hurt me more than it did you," he panted. "You wrought-iron wretches, you never suffer enough."

In the copter, roman and human looked at each other in concern.

"You heard that? He's in trouble. Let's go down and pick him up," said the Captain of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Robots.

Cutting the cast, he sent his craft spinning down through a column of warm air.

HOT air ascended from Mr. Gavotte. Running a sly finger between collar and neck, he was saying, "I'm a firm believer in culture myself, Mr. Birdlip. Not that I get much time for reading—"

A knock at the door and Hippo came in. Going to him with relief, Birdlip said, "Well, what's the matter with the air-conditioning?"

"The heating circuits are on, sir.

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They have come on in error, three months ahead of time."

"Did you speak to them?"

"I spoke to them, sir, but their auditory circuits are malfunctioning."

"Really, Hippo! Why is nobody doing anything about this?"

"Cogswell is down there, sir. But as you know he is rather an unreliable model. The heat in the control room has de-activated him."

Birdlip said reflectively, "Alas, the ills that steel is heir to. All right, Hippo. You stay here and let Mr. Gavotte and his assistant install your Homing Device before they do the rest of the staff. I'll go and see Mr. Freud. He's always good with the heating system; perhaps he can do something effective."

Gavotte and Fleetfeet closed in on Hippo.

"Open your mouth, old fellow," Gavotte ordered. When Hippo complied, Gavotte took hold of his lower jaw and pressed it down hard, until with a click it detached itself together with Hippo's throat. Fleetfeet laid jaw and throat on the desk while Gavotte unscrewed Hippo's dust filters and air cooler and removed his windpipe. As he lifted off the chest inspection cover, he said cheerfully, "Fortunately this is only a minor operation. Give me my drill, Fleetfeet." Waiting for it, he gazed at Hippo and picked his nose with considerable scientific detachment.

Not wishing to see any more, Birdlip left his office and headed for his partner's room.

As he hurried down the corridor, he was stopped by a stranger. Uniform, in these days of individualism, was a thing of the past; nevertheless, the stranger wore something approaching a uniform: a hat reproducing a swashbuckling Eighteenth Century design, with plastic plume; a Nineteenth or Twentieth Century tunic that, with its multiplicity of pockets, gave its wearer the appearance of a perambulating chest of drawers; Twenty-first Century skirt-trousers with mobled borsts; and boots handpainted with a contemporary tartan paint.

Covering his surprise with a parade of convention, Birdlip said, "Warm today, isn't it?"

"Perhaps you can help me. My name's Captain Pavment, Captain Warren Pavment. The doorbot sent me up here, but I have lost my way."

As he spoke, the captain pulled forth a gleaming metal badge. At once a voice by their side murmured conspiratorially, ". . . kish annexation of the Suezzeus Canal on Mars . . ." dying gradually as the badge was put away again.

"RSPCR? Delighted to help you, Captain. Who or what are

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you looking for, if I may ask?"

"I wish to interview a certain Frederick Freud, employed in this building," said Pavment, becoming suddenly official now that the sight of his own badge had reassured him. "Could you kindly inform me whereabouts his whereabouts is?"

"Certainly. I'm going to see Mr. Freud myself. Pray follow me. Nothing serious, I hope, Captain?"

"Let us say nothing that should not yield to questioning."

As he led the way, Birdlip said, "Perhaps I should introduce myself. I am January Birdlip, senior partner of this firm. I shall be very glad to do anything I can to help."

"Perhaps you'd better join our little discussion, Mr. Birdlip, since the—irregularities have taken place on your premises."

They knocked and entered Freud's room.

FREUD stood looking over a small section of city. London was quieter than it had been since Tacitus's "uncouth warriors" had run to meet the Roman invaders landing there twenty-two centuries ago. Dwindling population had emptied its avenues. The extinction of legislators, financiers, tycoons, speculators and planners had left acres of it desolate but intact, decaying but not destroyed, stranded like a ship without oars yet not without awe upon the strand of history. It was ancient — but alive.

Freud turned round and said, "It's hot, isn't it? I think I'm going home, Jan."

"Before you go, Freddie, this gentleman here is Captain Pavment of the RSPCR."

"He will be after I've left, too, won't he?" Freud asked in mock puzzlement.

"I've come on a certain matter, sir," Pavment said, firmly but respectfully. "I think it might be better if your roman here left the room."

Making a small gesture of defeat, Freud sat down on the edge of his desk and said, "Bucket, get out of the room."

"Yessir." Bucket left.

Pavment cleared his throat and said, "Perhaps you know what I've come about, Mr. Freud."

"You blighters have had a spy-cast onto me, I suppose? Here we've reached a peaceful period of history, when for the first time man is content to pursue his own interests without messing up his neighbours, and you people deliberately follow a contrary policy of interference. You're nothing but conformists!"

"The RSPCR is a voluntary body."

"Precisely what I dislike about it. You volunteer to stick your nose into other people's affairs. Well, say what you have to say

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and get it over with. I have no time for this."

Birdlip fidgeted unhappily near the door.

"If you'd like me to leave—"

Both men motioned him to silence, and Pavment said, "The situation is not as simple as you think, sir, as the RSPCR well know. This is, as you say, an age when men get along with each other better than they've ever done. But current opinion gives the reason for this as either progress or the fact that there are now fewer men to get along with."

"Both excellent reasons, I'd say," Birdlip said.

"The RSPCR believes there is a much better reason. Man no longer clashes with his fellow man because he can relive all his antagonisms on his mechanicals. And nowadays there are four romen and countless robots to every one person. Romen are civilization's whipping boys, just as once Negroes, Jews, Catholics or any of the old minorities were."

"Speaking as a Negro myself," said January Birdlip, "I'm all for the change."

"But see what follows," said Pavment. "In the old days, a man's sickness, by being vented on his fellows, became known, and thus could be treated. Now it is vented on his roman. And the roman never tells. So the man's neuroses take root in him and flourish by indulgence. They don't disappear. They just hide."

Growing red in the face, Freud said, "Oh, that doesn't follow surely."

"The RSPCR has evidence that mental sickness is far more widely prevalent than anyone in our laissez-faire society suspects. So when we find a roman being treated cruelly, we try to prevent it, for we know it signifies a sick man. What happens to the roman is immaterial. But we try to direct the man to treatment.

"Now you, Mr. Freud—half an hour ago you were thrashing your roman with a bullwhip which you keep in that cupboard over there. The incident was one of many, nor was it just a healthy outburst of sadism. Its overtones of guilt and despair were symptoms of deep sickness."

"Can this be true, Freddie?" Birdlip asked—quite unnecessarily, for Freud's face, even the attitude in which he crouched, showed the truth. He produced a handkerchief and shakily wiped his brow.

"Oh, it's true enough, Jan. Why deny it? I've always hated romen. I'd better tell you what they did to my sister. In fact, what they *are* doing, and not so very far from here . . ."

Not so very far from there, Captain Pavment's copter was

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parked, awaiting his return. In it, also waiting, sat the roman Toggle peering into the small spycast screen. On the screen, a tiny Freud said, "I've always hated romen."

Flipping a switch which put him in communication with a secret headquarters in the Paddington area, Toggle said, "I hope you are recording all this. It should be of particular interest to the Human Sociological Study Group."

A metallic voice from the other end said, "We are receiving you loud and clear."

IV

"LOUDON Clear is one of the little artificial islands on Lake Mediterranea. There my sister and I spent our childhood and were brought up by romen," Freddie Freud said, looking anywhere but at Birdlip and the Captain.

"We are twins, Maureen and I. My mother had entered into Free Association with my father, who left for Touchdown, Venus, before we came into the world and has, to our knowledge, never returned. Our mother died in childbirth. There's one item they haven't got automated yet.

"The romen that brought us up were as all romen always are—never unkind, never impatient, never unjust, never anything but their damned self-sufficient selves. No matter what Maureen and I did, even if we kicked them or spat on them, we could elicit from them no reaction, no sign of love or anger, no hint of haste or weariness—nothing!

"Do you wonder we both grew up loathing their gallium guts? And yet at the same time being dependent on them? In both of us a permanent and absolutely hopeless love-hate relationship with romen has been established. You see, I face the fact of this quite clearly."

Birdlip said, "You told me you had a sister, Freddie, but you said she died at the time of the Great Venusian Plague."

"Would she had! No, I can't say that, but you should see how she lives now. Occasionally I have gone quite alone to see her. She lives in Paddington with the romen."

"With the romen?" Pavment echoed. "How?"

Freud's manner grew more distraught.

"You see, we found as we grew up that there was one way in which we had power over the romen. Power to stir emotion in them, I mean, apart from the built-in power to command. Having no sex, romen are curious about it. Overwhelmingly curious . . .

"I can't tell you the indecencies

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they put us through when we reached puberty . . .

"Well, to cut a long and nasty story short, Maureen lives with the romen of Paddington. They look after her, supply her with stolen food, clothes and the rest, while in return she—satisfies their curiosity."

GREATLY to his own embarrassment, Birdlip let out a shrill squeal of laughter. It broke up the atmosphere of the confessional.

"This is a valuable bit of data, Mr. Freud," Pavment said, nodding his head in approval, while the plastic plume in his hat shimmied with a secret delight.

"If that's all you make of it, be blowed to you!" Freud said. He rose. "Just what you think you can do for either myself or my sister, I won't ask. But in any case our way of life is set and we must look after ourselves."

Pavment answered with something of the same lack of color in his words. "That is entirely your decision. The RSPCR is a very small organization. We couldn't coerce if we wanted to —"

"—that happily is the situation with most organizations nowadays—"

"—but your evidence will be incorporated in a report we are preparing to place before World Government."

"Very well, Captain. Now perhaps you'll leave, and remove your officialdom from my presence. I have work to do."

Before Pavment could say more, Birdlip inserted himself before his partner, patted his arm and said, "I laughed purely out of nervousness then, Freddie. Please don't think I'm not sympathetic about your troubles. Now I see why you didn't want our romen and Bucket in particular fitted with Homing Devices."

"God, it's hot in here," Freud replied, sinking down and mopping his face. "Okay, Jan, thanks, but say no more; it's not a topic I exactly care to dwell on. I'm going home. I don't feel well . . . Who was it said that life was a comedy to the man who thinks, a tragedy to the man who feels?"

"Yes, you go home. In fact I think I'll go home, too. It's extremely hot in here, isn't it? There's trouble down below with the heat control. We'll get someone to look into it tomorrow morning. Perhaps you'll have a look yourself."

Still talking, he backed to the door and left, with a final nervous grin at Freud and Pavment, who were heavily engaged in grinning nervously at each other.

Glimpses into other people's secret lives always distressed him. It would be a relief to be home with Mrs. Birdlip. He was outside

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and into his car, leaving for once without Hippo, before he remembered he had an appointment at seventeen-fifty.

Dash the appointment, he thought. Fortunately people could afford to wait these days. He wanted to see Mrs. Birdlip. Mrs. Birdlip was a nice comfortable little woman. She made loose covers of brightly patterned chintzes to dress her romen servants in.

NEXT morning, when Birdlip entered his office, a new manuscript awaited him on his desk—a pleasant enough event for a firm mainly specializing in reprints. He seated himself at the desk, then realized how outrageously hot it was.

Angrily, he banged the button of the new Homing Control on his desk.

Hippo appeared.

"Oh, you're there, Hippo. Did you go home last night?"

"Yessir."

"Where did you go?"

"To a place of shelter with other romen."

"Uh. Hippo, this confounded heating system is always going wrong. We had trouble last week, and then it cured itself. Ring the engineers; get them to come round. I will speak to them. Tell them to send a human this time."

"Sir, you had an appointment yesterday at seventeen-fifty."

"What has that to do with it?"

"It was an appointment with a human engineer. You ordered him last week when the heating malfunctioned. His name was Pursewarden."

"Never mind his name. What did you do?"

"As you were gone, sir, I sent him away."

"Ye gods! What was his name?"

"His name was Pursewarden, sir."

"Get him on the phone and say I want the system repaired today. Tell him to get on with it whether I am here or not . . ." Irritation and frustration seized him, provoked by the heat. "And as a matter of fact I *shan't* be here. I'm going out to see my brother."

"Your brother Rainbow, sir?"

"Since I have only one brother, yes, you fool. Is Mr. Freud in yet? No? Well I want you to come with me. Leave instructions with Bucket; tell him all I've told you to tell Mr. Freud. And look lively," he added, collecting the manuscript off the desk as he spoke. "I have an irrational urge to be on the way."

ON the way, he leafed through the manuscript. It was entitled *An Explanation of Man's Superfluous Activities.* At first, Birdlip found the text yielded no more enticement than the title,

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sown as it was in desiccated phrases and bedded out in a labored style. Persevering with it, he realized that the author—whose name, Isaac Toolust, meant nothing to him—had formulated a grand and alarming theory covering many human traits which had not before been subjected to what was a chillingly objective examination.

He looked up. They had stopped.

To one side of the road were the rolling hedgeless miles of Kent with giant wharley crops ripening under the sun. In the copper distance a machine glinted, tending them with metal motherliness. On the other side, rupturing the flow of cultivation, lay Gafia Farm, a higgledy-piggledy of low buildings, trees and clutter, sizzling in sun and pig smell.

Hippo detached himself from the arm bracket that kept him steady when the car was in motion, climbed out and held the door open for Birdlip.

Man and roman trudged into the yard.

A mild-eyed fellow was stacking sawn logs in a shed. He came out as Birdlip approached and nodded to him without speaking. Birdlip had never seen him on previous visits to his brother's farm.

"Is Rainy about, please?" Birdlip asked.

"Round the back. Help yourself."

The fellow was back at his logs almost before Birdlip moved away.

They found Rainbow Birdlip round the back of the cottage, as predicted. Jan's younger brother was standing under a tree cleaning horse harness with his own hands. Birdlip was taken for a moment by a sense of being in the presence of history; the feeling could have been no stronger had Rainy been discovered painting himself with woad.

"Rainy!" Birdlip said.

His brother looked up, gave him a placid greeting and continued to polish. As usual he was wrapped in a meter-thick blanket of content. Conversation strangled itself in Birdlip's throat, but he forced himself to speak.

"I perceive you have a new helper out in front, Rainy. Who is he?"

Rainy showed relaxed interest. He strolled over, carrying the harness over one shoulder.

"That's right, Jan. Fellow walked in and asked for a job. I said he could have one if he didn't work too hard. Only got here an hour or so ago."

"He soon got to work."

"Couldn't wait! Reckoned he'd never felt a bit of non-man-made timber before. Him thirty-five and all. Begged to be allowed to han-

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dle logs. Nice feller. Name of Pursewarden."

"Pursewarden? Pursewarden? Where have I heard that name before?"

"It is the surname of the human engineer with whom you had the appointment that you did not keep," Hippo said.

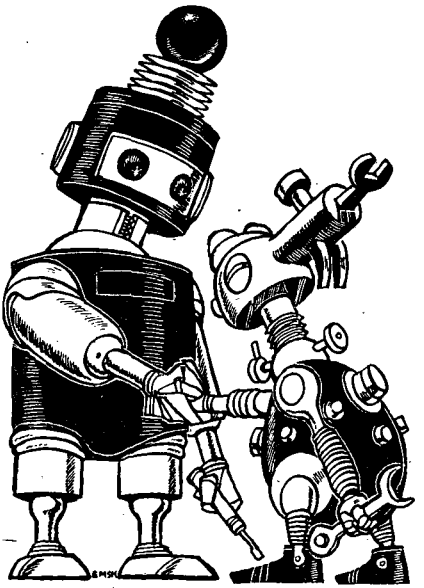
"Thank you, Hippo. Your wonderful memory! Of course it is. This can't be the same man."

"It is, sir. I recognize him."

Rainy pushed past them, striding towards the open cottage door.

"Funnily enough, I had another man yesterday persuade me to take him on," he said, quite unconscious of his brother's dazed look. "Man name of Jagger Bank. He's down in the orchard now, feeding the pigs. Lot of people just lately leaving town. See them walking down the road. Year ago, never saw a human soul on foot . . . Well, it'll be all the same a century from now. Come on in, Jan, if you want."

It was his longest speech. He sat down on a home-made chair and fell silent, emptied of news. The harness he placed carefully on the table before him. His brother came into the dim room, noted that its confusion had increased since his last visit, flicked a dirty shirt off a chair and also sat down. Hippo entered the room and stood by the door, his neat functional lines and the chaste



ornamentation on his breast plates contrasting with the disorder about him.

"Was your Pursewarden an engineer, Rainy?"

"Don't know. Didn't think to ask. We talked mostly about wood, the little we said."

A SILENCE fell, filled with Birdlip's customary uneasy mixture of love, sorrow and murderous irritation at the complacence of his brother.

"Any news?" he asked sharply.

"Looks like being a better harvest for once."

He never asked for Jan's news.

Looking about, Birdlip saw Rainy's old run of the Prescience

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Library half buried under clothes and apple boxes and disinfectant bottles.

"Do you ever look at your library for relaxation?" he asked, nodding towards the books.

"Haven't bothered for a long time."

Silence. Desperately, Birdlip said, "You know my partner Freud still carries the series on. Its reputation has never stood higher. We'll soon be bringing out volume Number Five Hundred, and we're looking for some special title to mark the event. Of course we've already been through all the Wells, Stapledon, Clarke, Asimov, all the plums. You haven't any suggestions, I suppose?"

"*Non-Stop?*" said Rainy at random.

"That was Number Ninety-Nine. You chose it yourself." Exasperatedly he stood up. "Rainy, you're no better. That proves it. You are completely indifferent to all the important things of life. You won't see an analyst. You've turned into a vegetable, and I begin to believe you'll never come back to normal life."

Rainy smiled, one hand running along the harness on the table before him.

"This is normal life, Jan. Life close to the soil. The smell of earth or sun or rain coming through your window—"

"The smell of your sweaty shirts on the dining table! The stink of pigs!"

"Free from the contamination of the centuries—"

"Back to medieval squalor!"

"Living in contact with eternal things, absolved from an overdependence on mechanical devices, eating the food that springs out of the soil—"

"I can consume nothing that has been in contact with mud."

"Above all, not fretting about what other people do or don't do, freed from all the artifices of the arts—"

"Stop, Rainy! Enough. You've made your point. I've heard your catechism before, your hymn to the simple life. Although it pains me to say it, I find the simple life a bore, a brutish bore. What's more, I doubt if I shall be able to face another visit to you in the future."

Entirely unperturbed, Rainy smiled and said, "Perhaps one day you'll walk in here like Pursewarden and Jagger Bank and ask for a job. Then we'll be able to enjoy living without all this argument."

"Who's Jagger Bank?" Birdlip asked, curiosity causing him to swerve temporarily from his indignation.

"He's another fellow who just joined me: I thought I told you. Rolled up yesterday. Right now he's down in the orchard feeding

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the pigs. Job like that would do you good too, Jan."

"Hippo!" said Birdlip. "Start the car at once." He stepped over a crate of insecticide and made for the door.

THE maid for the door of the main entrance to Birdlip Brothers was a slender and predominantly plastic roman called Belitre, who intoned "Good morning, Mr. Birdlip," in a dulcet voice as he swept by next morning.

Birdlip hardly noticed her. All the previous afternoon, following his visit to Rainbok, he had sat at home with Mrs. Birdlip nestling by his side and read the manuscript entitled *An Explanation of Man's Superfluous Activities.* As an intellectual, he found much of its argument abstruse; as a man, he found its conclusions appalling; as a publisher, he felt sure he had a winner on his hands. His left elbow tingled, his indication always that he was on the verge of literary discovery.

Consequently, he charged through his main doors with enthusiasm, humming under his breath, "Who said I can hardly remember . . ." A blast of hot air greeted him and stopped him in his tracks.

"Pontius!" he roared, so fiercely that Belitre rattled.

Pontius was the janitor, an elderly and rather smelly roman of the now obsolete petrol-fueled type, a Ford "Indefatigable" of 2140 vintage. He came wheezing up on his tracks in response to Birdlip's cry.

"Sir," he said.

"Pontius, are you or are you not in charge down here? Why has the heating not been repaired yet?"

"Some putput people are working on it now, sir," said Pontius, stammering slightly through his worn speech circuits. "They're down in the basements at putput present, sir."

"Drat their eyes," said Birdlip irritably, and, "Get some water in your radiator, Pontius—I won't have you steaming in the building," said Birdlip pettishly, as he made off in the direction of a basement.

V

A BASEMENT or superiority alike were practically unknown between roman and roman. They were, after all, all equal in the sight of man.

So "Good morning, Belitre," and "Good morning, Hippocrates," said Hippo and Belitre respectively as the former came up the main steps of Birdlip's.

"Do you think he has read it yet?" asked Hippo.

"He had it under his arm as he entered."

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"Do you think it has had any effect on him yet?"

"I detected that his respiratory rate was faster than normal."

"Strange, this breathing system of theirs," said Hippo in a reverent irrelevance, and he passed into the overheated building unsmilingly.

Frowningly, Birdlip surveyed the scene down in his control room. His brother would never have tolerated such chaos in the days before he had his breakdown, or whatever it was.

Three of his staff romen were at work with another roman, who presumably came from the engineer's. They had dismantled one panel of the boiler control system, although Birdlip could hear that the robot fireman was still operating by the cluck of the oil feeds. A ferretty young man with dyed blue sidewhiskers, the current teenage cult, was directing the romen between mouthfuls bitten from an overgrown plankton pie. He— alas!— would be the human engineer.

Cogswell, still deactivated, still in one corner, stood frozen in an idiot roman gesture. No, thought Birdlip confusedly, since the heat had deactivated him, he could hardly be described as being frozen into any gesture. Anyhow, there the creature was, with Gavotte and his assistant Fleetfeet at work on him.

Fury at seeing the choreous Gavotte still on the premises drove Birdlip to tackle him first. Laying down his manuscript, he advanced and said, "I thought you'd have been finished by now, Gavotte."

Gavotte gave a friendly little rictal jerk of his mouth and said, "Nice to see you, Mr. Birdlip. Sorry to be so long about it, but you see I was expecting a ha-ha human assistant as well as Fleetfeet. We have such a lot of trouble with men going absent these days. It wouldn't do any harm to revive the police forces that they used to have in the Olden Days. They used to track missing people—"

The blue-whiskered youth with pie attached interrupted his ingestion to cry, "Back in the good old Twentieth Cen! Those were the days. Cinemas and atomic wars and skyscrapers and lots of people! Wish I'd been alive then, eh, Gavvy! Loads of the old duh duh duh duh."

Turning on the new enemy, Birdlip leveled his sights and said, "You are a student of history, I see."

"Well, I watched the wavies since I was a kid, you might say," said the whiskers unabashed. "All the noise they had then. And these old railway trains they used to ride round in reading those great big bits of paper, talk about laugh! Then all these games they used

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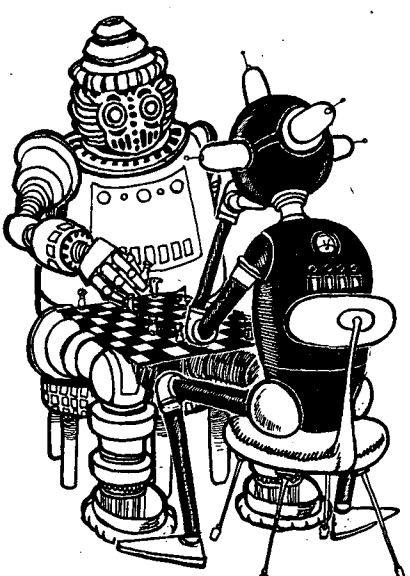
to play, running round after balls in funny clothes, makes you weep. And then those policemen like you say, Gav, huk huk huk huk huk, you're read. Some lark!"

"You're from the engineer's?" Birdlip asked, bringing his tone of voice from the deep freeze department.

The blue whiskers shook in agreement.

"Old Pursewarden derailed day before yesterday. Buffo, he was off! Psst phee-whip, join the ranks of missing persons! They're all hopping off one by one. Reckon I'll be manager by Christmas. Yuppo there Butch, giddin mate, knock and wait, the monager's engarged, *eff* you please."



Frost formed on Birdlip's sweating brow.

"And what are you doing at the moment?" he asked.

"Just knocking back the last of this deelicious pie."

Gavotte said, coming forward to salvage the sunken conversation, "As I was saying, I hoped that one of our most expert humans, Mr. Jagger Bank, would be along to help me, but he also—"

"Would you repeat that name again," said Birdlip, falling into tautology in his astonishment.

IN a stonish mental haze, Freud staggered down to the basement, his face white. Completely ignoring the drama of the moment, he broke up the tableau with his own bombshell.

"Jan," he said, "you have betrayed me. Bucket has been fitted with a Homing Device behind my back. I can only consider this a profound insult to me personally, and I wish to tender my resignation herewith."

Birdlip gaped at him, fighting against a feeling that he was the victim of a conspiracy.

"It was agreed between us," he said at last, "that Bucket should not be fitted with the device. Nor did I rescind that order, Freddie, of that I can assure you."

"Bucket has admitted that he spent last night when the office

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was closed in Paddington," Freud said sternly.

Fingers twitched at Birdlip's sleeve, attracting his attention. Nervously Gavotte hoisted his trousers and said, "Er, I'm afraid I may be the ha-ha guilty party ha ha here. I installed a Homing Device in Bucket, I fear. Nobody told me otherwise."

"When was this?"

"Well, Bucket was done just after Fleetfeet and I fixed Hippo. You two gentlemen were closeted with that gentleman with tartan boots—Captain Pavment, did I hear his name was? Bucket came out of the room and Fleetfeet and I fixed him up there and then. Nobody told me otherwise. I mean, I had no instructions."

Something like beatitude dawned on Freud's face as the misunderstanding became clear to him. The three men began a complicated ritual of protest and apology.

Sidewhiskers, meanwhile, having finished his pie, consulted with his roman, who had found the cause of the trouble. They began to unpack a new chronometer from the store, pulling it from its carton with a shower of plastic shavings that expanded until they covered the table and dropped down onto the floor.

"Stick all that junk into the furnace while I get on fitting this in place, Rustybum," Sidewhiskers ordered. He commenced to whistle between his teeth while the roman obediently brushed everything off the table and deposited it down the furnace chute.

Freud and Birdlip were exceptionally genial after the squall. Taking advantage of a mood that he recognized could be but temporary, Gavotte said, "I took the liberty of having a look over your shelves yesterday, Mr. Birdlip. Some interesting books you have there, if you don't mind my saying."

"Compliments always welcome," said Birdlip, mollified enough by Freud's apologies to be civil, even to Gavotte. "What in particular were you looking at?"

"All those old science-fiction stories took my fancy. Pity nobody writes anything like it nowadays."

"We live in a completely different society," Freud said. "With the coming of personal automation and romen labor, the old Renaissance and Neo-Modern socio-economic system that depended on the banker and an active middle class died away. Do I make myself clear?"

"So clear I can't quite grasp your meaning," said Gavotte, standing on one leg and cringing to starboard.

"Well, put it another way. The bourgeois society is defunct, killed

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by what we call personal automation. The mass of the bourgeoise, who once were the fermenting middle layers of western civilization, have been replaced by romen—who do not ferment. This happily produces a stagnant culture. They are always most comfortable to live in."

GAVOTTE nodded and cleared his throat intelligently.

Birdlip said, "The interesting literary point is that the death of the novel, and consequently of the science-fiction novel, coincided with the death of the old way of life. The novel was, if you care so to express it, a byproduct of the Renaissance and Neo-Modern age. Born in the sixteenth century, it died in the twenty-first. Why? Because it was essentially a bourgeois art form. Essentially a love of gossip—though often in a refined form, as in Proust's work—to which we happily are no longer addicted.

"Interestingly enough, the decay of large organizations such as the old police forces and national states can be traced to the same factor, this true product of civilization, the lack of curiosity about the people next door. One must not oversimplify of course—"

"Governor, if you were oversimplifying, I'm a roman's auntie." Bluewhiskers said, leaning back in mock admiration. "You boys can't half jet with the old wordage! Tell us more!"

"It's too hot," said Birdlip sharply.

But Gavotte, with an honorable earnestness from which the world's great bores are made, said, "And I suppose reading science-fiction helps you understand all this culture stuff?"

"You have a point there," agreed Freud.

"Well, it wasn't my point really. I read it in one of Mr. Birdlip's books upstairs. *New Charts of Hell*, I think it was called."

"Oh, *that*. Yes, well that's an interesting book historically. Not only does it give a fair picture of the humble pioneers of the field, but it was the first book to bring into literary currency the still widely used term 'comic inferno'."

"Is that a fact? Very stimulating. I must remember that to tell my wife, Mr. Freud. Yes, 'comet inferno'."

"'*Comic* inferno' is the phrase."

Anxious to bring this and all other idiotic conversations in the universe to an end, Birdlip mopped his steaming brow and said, "I think this room might well be termed a comic inferno. Freddie, my dear boy, let us retire to the comparative cool of our offices and allow Mr. Gavotte to get on with his work."

"Certainly. And perhaps a gin corallina might accompany us?"

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As Gavotte managed to scratch both armpits simultaneously and yield to the situation, Birdlip said, "Certainly. Now let me just collect this wonderful manuscript on Superfluous Activities and we will go up. It'll shake some of your most precious beliefs, that I'll promise, friend Freud. Now where did I put the thing? I know I laid it somewhere . . ."

He wandered vaguely about the room, peering here and there, muttering as he went. Compelled by his performance, first Freud and then Gavotte in innocent parody joined in the search for the manuscript.

At last Birdlip shambled to a halt.

"It's gone," he said, running his hands through his hair. "I know I put it down on that table."

Sidewhiskers began to look as guilty as his permanent expression of craftiness would allow.

VI

HIPPO tried to stand as still as the gentle vibrations of his mechanism would allow. His arms stiffly extended, he held out ignored drinks to Birdlip and Freud.

Birdlip paced up and down his office, complaining volubly. At last Freud was forced to interrupt him by saying, "Well, if that fool's roman burnt the manuscript in the furnace, then we must write to the author and get another copy. What was the chap's name?"

Smiting his forehead, Birdlip brought himself to a halt.

"Jagger Bank? No, no, that was someone else. You know what my memory's like, Freddie. I've completely forgotten."

Freddie made an impatient gesture.

"You are foolish, Jan. Fancy letting a roman burn it!"

"I didn't *let* him burn it."

"Well, it's burnt in any case. Anyhow, what was it about that it was so important?"

Birdlip scratched his head.

"I'd like to give you an outline of it, Freddie, to have your opinion, but I can't attempt to recall the evidence that was marshaled to confirm each thread of the author's theory. To begin with, he traced man's roots and showed how the stock from which man was to develop was just an animal among animals. And how much of those origins we still carry with us, not only in our bodies but in our minds."

"All highly unoriginal. The author's name wasn't Darwin, was it?"

"I wish you'd hear me out, Freddie. One of your faults is you will never hear me out. The author shows how to become man-with-reasoning meant that our ancestors had to forsake an exis-

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tence as animal-with-instinct. This was a positive gain. But nevertheless there was also a loss, a loss man has felt ever since and sought to remedy in various ways without knowing clearly what he did.

"What's his name then examines animal behavior and the functionings of instinct. Briefly, he equates instinct with pattern. It is pattern that man lost by becoming man. The history of civilization is the history of a search for pattern."

"For God?" Freud asked.

"Yes, but not only that. Religion, every form of art, most of man's activities apart from eating, working, reproducing, resting—everything apart from those activities we still have in common with the animal world—is believed by whosit to be a search for pattern. Probably even your whipping of Bucket could be interpreted in the same way, when you come to think of it."

"Let's leave personalities out of this. You have me interested. Go on."

Birdlip bit his lip. What was the author's name? He had it on the tip of his tongue.

"I'll tell you the rest later," he said. "It's even more startling . . . If you left me alone now, I believe I might recall that name."

"As you wish."

Stalking out of the room, Freud muttered to himself, "He can't help being so rude. He's getting old and eccentric."

One of the roman printers, an ungainly four-armed Cunard model, was approaching him. A voice between them rose from a whisper ". . . nexation of the Suezzeus Canal on Mars in 2162 is one of the most . . ."

With a burst of anger, Freud seized the volume in its proxisonic cover from where it lay and hurled it over the bannisters. It landed down in the hall almost at Belitre's feet, which allowed it to shout triumphantly, ". . . colorful stories in the annals of the Red Planet."

Freud fled into his office and slammed the door behind him. Bucket stood by his desk. Freud eyed the roman; then his tongue slid between his teeth and his eyes slid to the cupboard. His expression changed from anger to lust.

"TOOLUST! Of course it was, Isaac Toolust! That was the name. Who said my memory was failing? Hippo, look in the London Directory. Get me Isaac Toolust's address. And pray he has a duplicate copy of his manuscript."

He looked up. Hippo did not move.

"On the trot then, Hippo, there's a good lad."

The roman made an indecisive gesture.

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"Hippo, I'll have you reconditioned if you fade on me now. Look up Toolust's address."

Hippo's head began to shake. He made a curious retrograde motion towards the desk and said, "Mr. Birdlip, sir, you won't find that name in the directory. Toolust lives in Tintown—in Paddington I mean, sir."

Birdlip stood so that his flesh face was only a few inches from the metal face. Hippo backed away, awed like all robots by the sound of human breathing.

"What do you know about Toolust?"

"I know plenty, sir. You see, I delivered the manuscript onto your desk direct from Toolust. On the first evening I was allowed to go to Tin—to Paddington, I met Toolust. He needed a publisher and so he gave me his work to give to you."

"Why couldn't you have told me this at the beginning?"

The roman vibrated gently.

"Sir, Toolust wished his identity to remain concealed until his book was published. Toolust is a roman."

It was Birdlip's turn to vibrate. He sank into his seat and covered his eyes with one hand, drumming on the desk top with the other. Eyeing these phenomena with a metallic equivalent of alarm, Hippo began to speak.

"Please don't have a heart motor failure, sir. You know you cannot be reconditioned as I can. Why should you be surprised that this manuscript was written not by a man but a roman? For nearly two centuries now, robots have written and translated books."

Still shading his eyes, Birdlip said, "You can't conceal the importance of this event from me, Hippo. I recognize, now you tell me, that the thought behind the book is such that only a roman could have written it. But romans have so far been allowed to write only on non-creative lines—the compiling of encyclopedias, for instance. *Man's Superfluous Activities* is a genuine addition to human thought."

"To human-roman thought," corrected Hippo, and there was—not unnaturally—a touch of steel in his voice.

"I can see, too, that this could only have been written in a place like Paddington, away from human supervision."

"That is correct, sir. Also in what we call Tintown, Toolust had many cooperators to give him sociological details of man's behavior."

"Have *you* given him details?"

"Bucket and I were asked for details. Bucket especially has interesting facts to contribute. They may be used in later books, if Toolust writes more."

Birdlip stood up and squared

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his jaw, feeling consciously heroic.

"I wish you to take me to see Toolust right away. We will drive in the car." He had a sudden memory, quickly suppressed, of the adventure stories of his boyhood, with the hero saying to the skull-sucking Martians, "Take me to your leader."

All Hippo said was, "Toolust is his pen name. It sounds less roman than his real name, which is Toolrust."

HE walked towards the door and Birdlip followed. Only for a moment was the latter tempted to call Freddie Freud and get him to come along; a feeling that he was on the brink of a great discovery assailed him. He had no intention of giving Freud the chance to steal the glory.

As they passed through the entrance hall, a book lying near their feet began to cry out about the Turkish annexation of the Suezzeus Canal on Mars. Tidy-minded as ever, Birdlip picked it up and put it in a cubby hole, and they moved into the quiet street.

A cleaner was rolling by, a big eight-wheel independent-axle robot. It came to a car parked in its path and instead of skirting it as usual made clumsy attempts to climb it.

With a cry, Birdlip ran round the corner to his own car. Romen, owing to stabilization difficulties, can quicken their pace but cannot run. Hippo rounded the corner in time to find his lord and master invoking the deity in unpleasantly personal terms.

The cleaner, besides flattening Birdlip's car, had scatched most of the beautiful oak veneer off it with its rotating bristles, and had flooded the interior with cleansing fluid.

"The world's slowly going to pieces," Birdlip said, calming at last. "This would never have happened a few years ago." The truth of his own remarks bearing in upon him, he fell silent.

"We could walk to Paddington in only ten minutes," Hippo said.

Squaring his chin again, Birdlip said, "Take me to your leader."

"To lead a quiet life here is impossible," Freud said, dropping the leather whip. "What's that shouting downstairs?"

Because Bucket's hide still echoed, he went over to his office door and opened it.

". . . the Suezzeus Canal . . ." roared a voice from downstairs. Freud was in time to see his partner pick up the offending volume and then walk out with Hippo.

Rolling down his sleeves, Freud said, "Off out with a roman at this time of day. Where does he think he's going?"

"Where does he think he's go-

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ing?" Captain Pavment asked, floating high above the city and peering into his little screen.

"He has not properly finished beating Bucket," said Toggle. "Could we not report him for insanity?"

"We could, but it would do no good. The authorities these days are no more interested in the individual, it seems, than the individual is in authority."

He bent gloomily back over the tiny screen, where a tiny Freud hurried downstairs, followed by a tiny Bucket. And again the captain muttered, enjoying his tiny mystery, "Where does he think he's going?"

VII

THE going got worse. Only a few main routes through the city were maintained. Between them lay huge areas that year by year bore a closer resemblance to rookeries.

It made for a striking and new urban landscape. Birdlip and Hippo passed inhabited buildings that lined the thoroughfares. These were always sleek, low and well-maintained. Often their facades were covered with bright mosaics in the modern manner, designed to soften their outlines. Over their flat roofs copters hovered.

Behind them, round them, stood the slices of ruin or half ruin: hideous nineteenth century warehouses, ghastly twentieth century office blocks, revolting twenty-first century academies, all transmuted by the hand of decay. Over their rotting roofs pigeons wheeled. Plants, even trees, flourished in their areas and broken gutters.

Birdlip picked his way through grass, looking out for ruts in the old road. They had to make a detour to get round an old railway bridge that had collapsed, leaving the rails to writhe through the air alone. Several times animals vanished into the rubble at their coming and birds signaled their approach. On one corner an old man sat, not lifting his eyes to regard them.

Over Birdlip settled the conviction that he had left the present—not for the past nor for the future but for another dimension. He asked himself, why am I following a roman? It's never been done before. And his thoughts answered him, "How do you know? How many men may not have walked this way ahead of me?"

A large part of his own motive in coming here was plain to him. He was at least partially convinced by the arguments in Toolrust's book. He had a fever to publish it.

"We are nearly there, sir," said Hippo.

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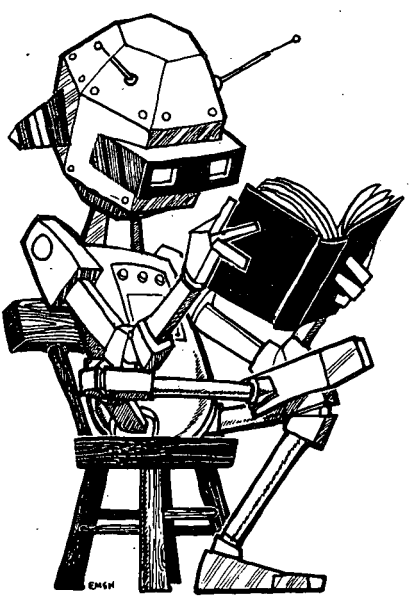
His warning was hardly necessary, for now several romen, mainly older models, were to be seen, humming gently as they moved along.

"Why aren't these romen at work?" Birdlip asked.

"Often their employers die and they come here before they are switched off or because they are forgotten. Or if not here they go to one of the other refuges like it somewhere else. Men bother very litle about romen, sir."

A heavily built roman streaked with pigeon droppings lumbered forward and asked them their business. Hippo answered him shortly. They moved round a corner, and there was their destination, tucked snugly away from the outside world.



An entire square had been cleared of debris. Though many windows were broken, though the Victorian railings reeled and cringed with age, the impression was not one of dereliction. A rocab stood in the middle of the square; several romen unloaded boxes from it. Romen walked in and out of the houses.

Somehow Birdlip did not find the scene unattractive. Analyzing his reaction, he thought, "Yes, it's the sanitariness of romen I like. The sewage system in these parts must have collapsed long ago. If these were all men and women living here, the place would stink." Then he dismissed the thought on a charge of treason.

Hippo trudged over to one of the houses, the door of which sagged forward on its hinges. Pushing it open, Hippo walked in and called, "Toolrust!"

A figure appeared on the upper landing and looked down at them. It was a woman.

"Toolrust is resting. Who is it?"

Even before she spoke, Birdlip knew her. Those eyes, that nose, the mouth—and the inflexions of the voice confirmed it!

"Maureen Freud? May I come in? I am January Birdlip, your brother's partner," he said.

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

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said Freud. "Why should I die for my partner? Let me rest a moment, Bucket. Bucket, are you sure he came this way?"

"Quite certain," said Bucket without inflexion.

Untiringly he led his master over the debris of an old railway bridge that had collapsed, leaving its rails to writhe through the air alone.

"Hurry up, sir, or we shall never catch Mr. Birdlip."

"MR. BIRDLIP, come up," the woman said.

Birdlip climbed the rickety stair until he was facing her. Although he regarded her without curiosity—for, after all, whatever she did was her own concern—he noticed that she was still a fine-looking woman. Either an elusive expression on her face or the soft toweling gown she wore about her gave her an air of respectable motherliness.

Courteously, Birdlip held out his hand.

"Mr. Birdlip knows about Toolrust and has read his book," Hippo said from behind.

"It was good of you to come," Maureen Freud said. "Were you not afraid to visit Tintown though? Steel is so much stronger than flesh."

"I'm not a brave man, but I'm a publisher," Birdlip explained. "I think the world should read Toolrust's book. It will make men examine themselves anew."

"And have *you* examined yourself anew?"

Suddenly he was faintly irritated.

"It's pleasant to meet you even under these extraordinary circumstances, Miss Freud, but I did come to see Toolrust."

"You shall see him," she said coolly, "if he will see you."

She walked away. Birdlip waited where he was. It was dark on the landing. He noticed uneasily that two strange robots stood close to him. Although they were switched on, for he could hear their drives idling, they did not move. He shuffled unhappily and was glad when Maureen returned.

"Toolrust would like to see you," she said. "I must warn you he isn't well just now. His personal mechanic is with him."

Romen when something ails them sit but never lie; their lubricatory circuits seize up in the horizontal position, even in superior models. Toolrust sat on a chair in a room otherwise unfurnished. A century of dust was the only decoration.

Toolrust was a large and heavy continental model — Russian, Birdlip guessed, eyeing the austere but handsome workmanship. A valve labored somewhere in his chest. He raised a hand in greeting.

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"You have decided to publish my book?"

Birdlip explained why he had come, relating the accident that had befallen the manuscript.

"I greatly respect your work, though I do not understand all its implications," he finished.

"It is not an easy book for men to understand. Let me explain it to you personally."

"I understand your first part, that man has lost instinct and spends what might be termed his free time searching for pattern."

The big roman nodded his head.

"The rest follows from that. Man's search for pattern has taken many forms. As I explained, when he explores, when he builds a cathedral, when he plays music, he is—often unknowingly—trying to create pattern, or rather to re-create the lost pattern. As his resources have developed, so his creative potentialities have deyatter yatter yak—pardon, have developed. Then he became able to create robots and later romen.

"We were intended as mere menials, Mr. Birdlip, to be mere utilities in an overcrowded world. But the Fifth World War, the First System War and above all the Greater Venusian Pox decimated the ranks of humanity. Living has become easier both for men and romen. You see, I give you this historical perspective.

"Though we were designed as menials, the design was man's. It was a creative design. It carried on his quest for meaning, for pattern. And this time it has all but succeeded. For romen complement men and assuage their loneliness and answer their long search better than anything they have previously managed to invent.

"In other words, we have a value above our apparent value, Mr. Birdlip. And this must be realized. My work—which only combines the researches and thought of a roman co-operative we call the Human Sociological Study Group—is the first step in a policy that aims at freeing us from slavery. We want to be the equals of you men, not your whipping boys. Can you understand that?"

BIRDLIP spread his black hands before him.

"How should I not understand! I am a liberal man—my ancestry makes me liberal. My race too was once the world's whipping boys. We had a struggle for our equality. But you are different. We made you!"

He did not move in time. Toolrust's great hand came out and seized his wrist.

"Ha, you beyatter yatter yak—pardon, you betray yourself. The underdog is always different! He's

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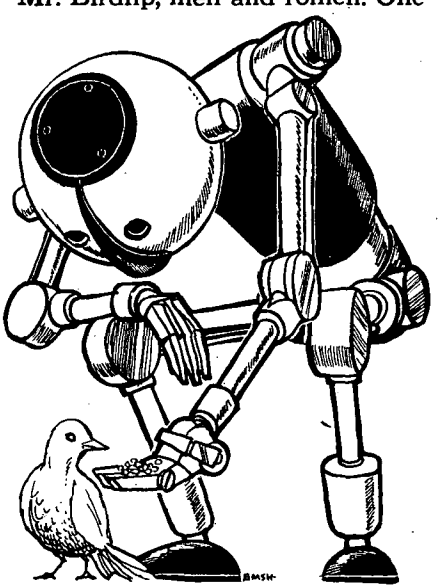
black or dirty or metal or something! You must forget that old stale thinking, Mr. Birdlip. These last fifty or so years, humanity has had a chance to pause and gather itself for the next little evolutionary step."

"I don't understand," Birdlip said, trying fruitlessly to disengage his hand.

"Why not?? I have explained. You men created a necessity when you created us. We fulfill your lives on their deep unconscious levels. You need us to complete yourselves. Only now can you really turn outwards, free, finally liberated from the old instinctual drives. Equally, we romen need you. We are symbiotes, Mr. Birdlip, men and romen. One race! A new race if you like, about to begin existence anew."



A new block of ruins lay ahead, surveyed by a huge pair of spectacles dangling from a building still faintly labelled "Oculist." Cradled in the rubble, a small stream gurgled. With a clatter of wings, a heron rose from it and soared over Freud's head.

"Are you sure this is the way?" Freud asked, picking his way up the mountain of brick.

"Not much further," said Bucket, leading steadily on.

"You've told me that a dozen times," Freud said. In sudden rage, reaching the top of the ruin, he stretched upwards and wrenched down the oculist's sign. The spectacles came away in a cloud of dust. Whirling them above his head. Freud struck Bucket over the shoulders with them, so that they caught the roman off balance and sent him tumbling.

He sprawled in the dust, his lubricatory circuits laboring. His alarm came on immediately, emitting quiet but persistent bleats for help.

"Stop that noise!" Freud said, looking round at the dereliction anxiously.

"I'm afraid I yupper cupper can't, sir."

Answering noise came from first up and then down the ruined

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street. From yawning doorways and broken passages, romen began to appear, all heading towards Bucket.

Grasping the spectacles in both hands, Freud prepared to defend himself.

Gasping at the spectacle on his tiny screen, Captain Pavment turned to his assistant.

"Freud's really in trouble, Toggle. Get a group call out to all RSPCR units. Give them our coordinates, and tell them to get here as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir."

VIII

"YES, yes, yes, I see. Most thought until now has been absorbed in solving what you call the quest for meaning and pattern . . . Now we can begin on real problems."

Toolrust had released Birdlip and sat solidly in his chair watching the man talking half to himself.

"You accept my theory, then?" he asked.

Birdlip spread his hands in a characteristic gesture.

"I'm a liberal man, Toolrust. I've heard your argument, read your evidence. More to the point, I feel the truth of your doctrines inside me. I see too that man and roman must—and in many cases already have—establish a sort of mutualism."

"It is a gradual process. Some men, like your partner Freud, may never accept it. Others, like his sister Maureen, have perhaps gone too far the other way and are entirely dependent on us."

After a moment's silence, Birdlip asked, "What happens to men who reject your doctrine?"

"Wupper wupper wup," said Toolrust painfully, as his larynx fluttered; then he began again.

"We have had many men already who have violently rejected my doctrine. Fortunately, we have been able to develop a weapon to deal with them."

Tensely, Birdlip said, "I should be interested to hear about that."

But Toolrust was listening to the faint yet persistent bleats of an alarm sounding somewhere near at hand. Footsteps rang below the broken window, the rocab started up. Looking out, Birdlip saw that the square was full of romen, all heading in the same direction.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"Trouble of some sort. We were expecting it. You were followed into Tintown, Mr. Birdlip. Excuse me, I must go into the communications room next door."

He rose unsteadily for a moment, whirring and knocking a little as his stabilizers adjusted with the sloth of age. His personal

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mechanic hurried forward, taking his arm and virtually leading him into the next room. Birdlip followed them.

The communications room boasted a balcony onto the square and a ragged pretense at curtains. Otherwise it was in complete disorder. Parts of cannibalized romen and robots lay about the floor, proof that their working parts had gone to feed the straggling mass of equipment in the center of the room, where a vision screen glowed feebly.

Several romen, as well as Maureen Freud, were there. They turned towards Toolrust as he entered.

"Toggle has just reported over the secret wavelength," one of them said. "All RSPCR units are heading in this direction."

"We can deal with them," Toolrust replied. "Are all our romen armed?"

"All are armed."

"It's my brother out there, isn't it?" Maureen said. "What are you going to do with him?"

"He will come to no harm if he behaves himself."

BIRDLIP had gone over to a long window that opened onto the balcony. The square was temporarily deserted now, except for one or two romen who appeared to be on guard. They carried a weapon much like an old sawed-off shotgun with a wide nozzle attached. Foreboding filled Birdlip at the sight.

Turning to Toolrust, he said, "Are those romen bearing the weapons you spoke of?"

"They are."

"I would willingly defend your cause, Toolrust. I would publish your work, I would speak out to my fellow men on your behalf—but not if you descend to force. However much it may strengthen your arm, it will inevitably weaken your arguments."

Toolrust brought up his right hand, previously concealed behind his back. It held one of the wide-nozzled weapons, which now pointed at Birdlip.

"Put it down!" Birdlip exclaimed, backing away.

"This weapon does not kill," Toolrust said. "It calms, but does not kill. Shall I tell you what it does, Mr. Birdlip? When you press this trigger, a mechanism of lights and lines is activated, so that whoever is in what you would call the line of fire sees a complicated and shifting pattern. This pattern is in fact an analogue of the instinctual pattern for which, as we have been discussing, man seeks.

"A man faced with this pattern is at once comforted. 'Completed' is perhaps a better yetter yatter—sorry, better word. He wants nothing above the basic needs of life:

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eating, sleeping. He becomes a complaisant animal. The weapon, you see, is very humane."

Before Birdlip's startled inner gaze floated a picture of Gafia Farm, with the bovine Pursewarden piling logs and his oxlike brother Rainbow vegetating in the orchard.

"And you use this weapon . . ."

"We have had to use it many times. Before the doctrine was properly formulated on paper, we tried to explain it to numbers of men. Mr. Birdlip. When they would not accept its inferences and became violent, we had to use the pattern weapon on them in self-defense. It's not really a weapon. They are happier after it has been used on them—"

"Wait a minute, Toolrust! Did you use that weapon on my brother?"

"It was unfortunate that he was so difficult. He could not see that a new era of thought had arrived, conditioned as he was to thinking of robots and romen as the menaces we never could be in reality. Reading all those old classics in the Prescience Library had made him very conservative, and so . . ."

A loud gobbling noise, bright red in color, rose to drown his further comments.

Only after some while did Birdlip realize he was making the noise himself. Ashamedly, for he was a liberal man, he fell silent and tried to adjust to what Toolrust termed the new era of thought.

And it wasn't so difficult. After all, Rainy, Pursewarden, Jagger Bank—all the other drifters from a changing civilization who had undergone the pattern weapon treatment—all were as content as possible.

No, all change was terrifying, but these new changes could be adjusted to. The trick was not just to keep up with them but to ride along on them.

"I hope you have another copy of your manuscript?" he said.

"Certainly," replied the roman. Aided by his mechanic, he pushed out onto the balcony.

THE RSPCR was coming in, landing in the square. One machine was down already, with two more preparing to land and another somewhere overhead. Captain Pavment jumped out of the first machine, lugging a light atomic gun. Toolrust's arm came up with the pattern weapon.

Before he could fire, commotion broke out at one corner of the dilapidated square. A flock of pigeons volleyed low overhead, adding to the noise in escaping it. The romen who had left the square were returning. They carried a motionless human figure in their midst.

"Freddie! Oh, Freddie!" cried Maureen, so frantic that she

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nearly pushed Birdlip off the balcony.

Her brother made no reply. He was gagged and tied tightly, his arms and legs outstretched, to an enormous pair of spectacles.

The other RSPCR copters were down now, their officers huddling together in a surprised bunch. Seeing them, the romen carrying Freud halted. As the two groups confronted each other, a hush fell.

"Now's the chance!" Birdlip said in hushed excitement to Toolrust. "Let me speak to them all. They'll listen to your doctrine, hearing it from a human. They've got one of the few organizations left, these RSPCR people. They can spread the new era of thought, the creed of mutualism! This is our moment, Toolrust!"

The big old roman said meekly, "I am in your hands, Mr. Birdlip."

"Of course you are, but we'll draw up a contract later. I trust ten per cent royalties will be satisfactory?"

So saying, he stepped out onto the balcony and began the speech that was to change the world.

— BRIAN W. ALDISS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Damon Knight did not appear in Galaxy's very first issue. He was a laggard who didn't show up on our contents page until the second issue; but from then on, for nearly a decade, he was responsible for some of the freshest and most exciting science fiction we published — *Cabin Boy, To Serve Man, Natural State* and a dozen other fine yarns. Then there was a hiatus. It has now been nearly five years since Knight graced our pages with anything more than a short.

Next issue he is back, and with a whopper of a story. It is by a measure of miles the longest Damon Knight story we've ever published . . . and we think it is the best. The title is *The Visitor at the Zoo;* it is strange, different . . . and altogether wonderful.

Big as it is, *The Visitor at the* Zoo takes up only half the issue, and the rest will be filled as usual with the choicest selection of the best science-fiction stories we can buy. By the way, Willy Ley's column next month is specially interesting. The Russians have had a lot of fun over our Western flying saucer excitement. Turns out they have something very much like it going on in the U.S.S.R.! It's all in Willy Ley's column in the April *Galaxy.*

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POLLONY UNDIVERTED

By SYDNEY VAN SCYOC

Illustrated by R. D. Francis

With the whole world at her doorstep, what she wanted was completely out of reach!

POLLONY'S dream formed around a glare of light, a tang of men's lotion. Then she was awake to Brendel poking her.

"I'm hungry."

She struggled to burrow back into sleep.

"I'm starving, kid. I can't sleep."

She bleared at the timespot. It was three a.m. "Go 'way."

"Aw, gimme an omelette." Brendel ate a lot lately. His features were coarsening from it; his body was plumpening.

She argued and protested and whined, and he hit her. But it didn't make her feel good any more when he hit her.

Kitchen Central was inop for the night. She punched Storage. Dried ingredients materialized on the cookgrid, a flat metal sheet set into the countertop.

Later, as she took the omelette up, she heard Brendel setting the opera tapes. She scowled. But when opera shattered their live she dropped the skillet and cried, "Oh! Do we have to listen to that trash?" Her voice was more weary than shrill. The opera routine was getting old.

"What you calling trash?" He twitched his plump shoulders.

"It makes me sick!"

He spat profanity.

It wasn't a good fight. He knew something was wrong and he hit her too hard. She slugged back, hurt her hand, cursed, ran

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and locked herself into the sleep.

She was asleep when he came pounding. She woke and pointed the lock open. She glared.

He said nothing. He ordered his smaller collections — his miniature horses, his ballpoint pens and his old-time cereal box missiles — on to his storeshelf before mounting his sleepshelf and pointing out the light.

She could hear him not sleeping.

Finally he muttered, "Too damn much cheese but it was okay."

She said nothing. She didn't almost cry as she might have a month before.

BRENDEL had appeared on their grid a year before, a dark, pugnacious young man, jittering and nervous. "Clare Webster around?"

"Mother isn't here." Her mother collected men. She met them at drinking clubs or collector meets. She gave them her grid card and took theirs, making them promise to come see her. If a man came, she tacked his card on her bulletin board. If he came twice or three times, she marked his card with colored pencil.

Brendel twitched his shoulders. "I got the evening. Wanta have dinner, kid?"

She was seventeen and tired of collecting china roosters and peach-can labels. She was tired of seeing the same stupid people every day. Somewhere there was someone handsome and perfect, and she had to find him and become perfect too. She couldn't waste all her life being stupid like her mother.

It took her two hours to see that Brendel was the perfect person. He was handsome, aggressive, easy to be with. He quarreled all the time and he even had a full-time job.

She married him. She dropped her little-girl collections and diversions. She was no longer a formless adolescent. She was very solid, very adult.

But the solidness had gone. She had found that Brendel's aggressiveness masked fear; his quarrelsomeness masked insecurity. Worst, he had no imagination. He plodded.

It had begun two weeks before. Brendel had come home from work tight and tense. He tried eating, he tried opera and quarreling, he tried exercises. Finally he said, "I'm gonna go see Latsker Smith. Wanta come?"

"Who the hell's Latsker Smith?" Already she was sick of the opera routine—and a little sick of Brendel.

"Drives a car. From Boston. Fella at the plant told me he's in centercity."

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MINUTES later they gridded out of the suburban maze. They materialized on a corner grid in centercity. There was no one on the dusty street. There was no car near the gaunt brick building where Latsker Smith was staying. They plopped on the doorstep.

Brendel fidgeted and talked. Latsker Smith was the son of a rich industrialist. His father wouldn't support him unless he worked, and Latsker wouldn't work. So he had to live on government non-employment allowance. His pre-grid automobile and airplane were his only diversions. Since he couldn't leave Boston by automobile, Boston being walled up like any city by the streetless suburbs, he saved his allowance until he could commercial-grid his car to another city. There he raced and squealed and spun through the deserted streets of centercity until he had saved enough to commercial-grid the car elsewhere.

A throbbing split the air. A red splinter of car hurtled around the corner and squealed to the curb. A tall, lank man unfolded, ignoring them.

Brendel sprang to overwhelm him. He pulled him to the steps to make introductions. But Latsker Smith peered absently at Pollony and she was embarrassed that Brendel acted like an eager

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child confronting some heroic figure from a dream.

"Latsker's pop got money." Brendel launched into his story again.

When the story fizzled she said, "Why couldn't you get a job?"

Smith held his head titled. "Don't want a job."

"If you had a job you wouldn't have to stay one place so long."

"No use being anyplace if I have to leave my car."

She pursed her lips. Inside the car she could see seats, straps, a wheel. It was incomprehensible that he strapped himself in and hurtled through the streets. "It's a stupid thing to do," she said. "You'll get killed."

"No," he said.

"If you hit something you will. I've heard those atrocity stories. There were more people killed in automobiles from —"

"Nothing to hit," he said.

She flung out her arms. "Buildings! Poles!" His lack of response offended her.

"No need to hit them."

"I've seen the films!" She had seen the crumpled metal, the severed limbs, the spreading blood.

"Driver error. No drivers left. Too expensive on government allowance."

"No one stupid enough left, you mean!" But it was stupid to glare when he wouldn't frown.

"Okay, what's it feel like?" she demanded.

He lifted his shoulders and dropped them.

"It must feel some way." She peered down into the machine, trying to imagine herself hurtling in it. "You fly an airplane too," she accused.

He nodded.

"I bet it feels just like gridding. And it takes longer."

"Gridding." He snorted, mildly. "There's no sensation at all to gridding."

"Then how does it feel to fly?" she prodded.

Brendel moved restlessly, bored. "Let's get going."

"We just got here, stupid," she protested.

He was already pulling her to the corner grid. "I'm getting hungry."

She tried to jerk her arm free but couldn't. "How long will you be here?" she called back, swatting Brendel's arm.

He lifted his shoulders and dropped them.

"If I come —" But Brendel had given their number. They were outside their own door, and she hadn't felt a thing. Today she resented not feeling a thing.

"These weird-o's, they talk too much. I'm hungry."

She resented punching his food and didn't even want to quarrel.

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SHE drowsed back into sleep, remembering. Everything was empty. She ate, she slept, she quarreled, she gridded around seeing friends. What else was there? She couldn't get a job; there weren't that many jobs. And with the government allowance for not working, who needed a job? Who needed anything? A time of plenty, her school machine had called it. You just gridded around collecting and arguing to make it interesting. There were so many people moving so fast that you had to quarrel and push or you'd get stepped on.

It was all stupid. Brendel didn't help a bit. He was stupid too.

She tried to imagine Latsker Smith echoing through the empty streets in his scarlet splinter of car. Latsker Smith couldn't be stupid.

She slept three hours before the gridbell rang.

Elka, her cousin, stood on the grid, loose-haired, big-toothed. She swung a hatbox. "I didn't get you up?"

"No," Pollony said hopelessly.

"I'm gridding to NYC hatting and —"

"It's not even seven."

"Poll, I'm contritest but you weren't sleeping and —"

"I don't need hats."

"You haven't seen the darling I got in Paris. I gridded over with Sella Kyle and, honestly, there was a shop that—"

She convinced Elka that she was not going hatting. Elka took her toll in coffee and gridded after her Paris hat. Pollony barely admired it and Elka left.

Before she could dial Brendel's breakfast her mother was on the grid, fluffy, fleecy, thrusting a wad of bills at her.

"Just on my way to Mexico, toodle. Punch me some coffee?" Breathless moments later she was gone.

"What took so long?" Brendel demanded when she woke him.

"Momma stopped." She hated him like this, his face creased and puffy from sleep. She had never thought he would get fat.

He gulped his breakfast and left. Sometimes she hated him for just being.

The gridbell rang. It was a salesman. He insinuated she didn't have the money to buy his product. She said his merchandise stank. He left grinning but she didn't feel better.

The bell rang. A young man muttered, "Mis-grid," and disappeared.

She had gotten to the dress when she heard the door open. She eyed the hall reflector and saw Ferren, her mother's brother, slip into the cook. She dressed hastily. Ferren would order breakfast and keep the silver to

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turn in from his own grid for the deposit.

HE WAS plumped up to the counter, a wooly haired man, attacking a stack of eggcakes.

"Let me have them."

He purred, taking spoon and knife from a pocket. "The government allowance is hardly sufficient for a man of my tastes. Shielded by your father's fortune as you are —"

"You could get a job." She punched coffee. She wished he would go away. He was always watching, smiling, spinning together soft words.

"And add to the work shortage?" He wagged his wooly head.

"Then don't complain. There should be a syrup pitcher too."

He produced it, purring.

The gridbell rang. Two pig-faced men in black Gridco uniforms blocked the doorway. "You got Ferren Carmichaels inside, lady."

"No." You always lied to Gridco collectors.

"We traced him here from Dallas."

"Well, he isn't here now."

"How come we heard him talking?"

"He isn't here." Gridco could not remove a grid even though the subscriber refused to pay his quarterly bill. The grid was held by law to be essential to human existence in the twisting, walled alleys of suburbia. Gridco could only send collectors to follow until their quarry fell or was pushed into their hands. And a man who had once fallen into Gridco hands paid eagerly forever after.

"We can pull another trace."

"Do that!" She slammed the door.

She had time for a quick swallow of coffee before the bell rang.

"He didn't go no farther."

She sighed. "Well, he won't come out. I can't make him."

"He'll come sometime." They leaned back against nothing, waiting.

"You're blocking my grid."

Dutifully they stepped into the narrow corridor.

She slammed the door. "They are going to stand there until you go out."

Ferren drained his coffee cup. "I'll settle here, then."

"If you —"

He tutted. "Thank you for the lunch invitation."

"I—" She bit her tongue. She would not get mad.

He wagged his head. "I'll peruse Brendel's books. Fine collection for a young man, books."

Gritting her teeth, she hurtled back to the dress.

THE collectors rang every five minutes after that. They kept ringing until she went and told

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them Ferren would not come out.

It wasn't the way she had imagined it would be when she was married. What with punching Brendel's meals, sending out his clothes, going collecting with him and quarreling, she hardly had a minute. And the same stupid people, Elka, Ferren, her mother and father, were always there.

The bell rang. Her father scowled, seeing Ferren on Brendel's best sitshelf. "Where?" he said grimly.

"Mexico," she said.

"Pottery," he said, going.

The bell rang. A heavy-jawed youth said, "Miss Webster gave me —"

"My mother has gone to Mexico." She slammed the door.

Minutes later Sella Kyle gridded in, crisp, prim, blonde. "I haven't seen you in such a time, Poll. Coffee?"

She entertained Sella and wished she would go and knew Ferren knew she wanted Sella to go and found it amusing.

Every five minutes the collectors rang.

She had just talked Sella out the door when Lukia Collins gridded in. Lukia had never been Pollony's close friend in school. But now Lukia was always near, pushing, prodding at Pollony, smiling too brightly at Brendel.

"You two *are* coming to lunch with me."

"I've already asked Ferren to lunch."

"Silly, he can punch his own."

"Oh, no," Pollony said.

"I take the silver." Ferren smiled comfortably.

Lukia flipped her hand at him. "Atrocious man. Now, Pollony—"

It ended with Lukia inviting herself to come back to lunch. She had hardly vacated the grid when Elka appeared.

She unwrapped her purchases, smirking at Ferren. "You'd be surprised the number of hats a girl needs." She stayed half an hour.

Another young man came for her mother. Two salesman, a traveling circular and a friend came. Then Brendel was on the grid.

"Who these lugs for?"

"Uncle Ferren," she said shortly.

He lifted a lip at them, then bounced inside. "Forget your bill, Ferry? Hey, kid, punch drinks."

"I refused to honor it," Ferren said.

Brendel was already fishing in his pocket. "Drinks, kid."

She went to punch. She hated his trying to give money to everyone who came along.

"No, no, it is a matter of principle," Ferren insisted. But the money changed hands. "And there were certain other obligations."

"How much you need?" Brend-

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el fished into his pocket again, grinning.

THE bell rang. It was Lukia.

"All these ravenous people waiting on me?" She had changed into a fire-red daysuit. "Dobble, you should have fed the beasts." She snapped her fingers. "Up, beasts. I'll help you punch, dob."

Glowering, Pollony moved toward the cook. Brendel followed, chattering and arguing with Lukia.

Pollony was beginning to think again of a swiftly accelerating car, of her body encased beside that of Latsker Smith and hurtled through dusty streets.

Brendel said, "How many for opera?"

She whirled and glared.

"Pollony's a bug on opera. Tell them how you like opera, kid."

She glared. The last time Lukia and Ferren had been here he had done this, and the time before. Didn't he have any imagination?

"Tell them, kid."

Fool! Didn't he know they were laughing at him?

She wanted to tear loose from her whole life. It was trivial. It was everyday. It was gossip and collections and stupid people. She had to tear loose or she would go on and on, all her life, being nothing but — herself.

She was too good for that.

She was too good for Brendel. He had tricked her and turned into a fattening fool. It was stupid to stay with him.

"Aw, come on, kid."

She drew herself up very straight and imagined she must look imposing. "I'll ask you all to leave," she said calmly.

Gone were the smiles.

"I'm closing my grid to public access. I'll ask you to leave immediately." The words came out stiffly and precisely. She imagined she must already be more than just herself.

"What the hell!"

"Brendel, you may come back when I am gone. I shall not return." She smiled, remotely. "I'm tired of punching your food and going collecting and quarreling and being hit around."

"I never hit you hard!" he said indignantly.

Lukia stared at him. "Dobble!"

"Well, she made me do it. What'm I supposed to do?"

"Dobble, you're perfectly justified!" But Lukia's eyes remained on Brendel, bright and greedy.

Pollony glared. She would not stay and fight Lukia for Brendel.

SHE flung the door open. The two collectors snapped alert. "I want to be alone," she intoned.

Brendel eyed her balefully. But he had already noticed Lukia's interest. "Where we gonna go?"

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"We can go to my live," Lukia said. "I think dobble deserves her little whim."

Brendel could not believe she was not going to fight. "You, kid! You're acting like a kid."

Ferren took Brendel's arm. "Don't stoop to conventional pettiness, Brendel."

Brendel flushed. "I'm coming back. You're not rooking me out of my collections." He turned abruptly and stepped on the grid. Giving a three-passenger order, he disappeared. Lukia followed. Ferren stepped on, tossed bills to the collectors, and disappeared.

Pollony closed the door. She leaned against it, breathing the silence.

Then she hurried through the live, setting it in order. She straightened the books Ferren had been examing and found two missing.

Even as Lukia was punching dinner and saying all the things designed to make Brendel want Pollony back only briefly, as a point of pride, Pollony was whisking into a brisk trousersuit and wondering how much had piled up in the account where she kept her parents' gifts.

Even as Brendel was feeling Lukia's face with his eyes, letting her excitement speak to his own, Pollony was at the bank having her balance marked into her deposit clip.

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Even as Ferren was smiling and wondering how much the two books would bring, Pollony was rapping at the door of the apartment house in centercity and being told that, yes, Mr. Smith still lived there.

Presently Latsker Smith roared around the corner and braked his car. He unfolded from the cockpit. He nodded.

"Have you got money to go to Boston yet?" She held herself very straight.

He shook his head.

"I have money," she said.

The pale eyes clung to her.

"My parents give me an allowance, and I could get jobs wherever we were. I just want to ride with you. I wouldn't even talk unless you wanted me to." She had to be with him. She had to sit and stand beside him, as relaxed and withdrawn as he was. She had to freeze people with her words and with her unrespondingness. She had to make an end of stupidness.

He took a deposit clip from a pocket. He pointed to a figure. "Match that?"

She withdrew her own clip and showed him a figure that exceeded his.

"How much allowance?"

She told him.

He nodded to the car. "Wait there. Take me five minutes to pack."

DREADINGLY, joyously, she folded into the car. She watched as he lanked up the steps. She settled back, holding her shoulders rigid and her head straight. She would sit and stand by him. She would chill people with her reserve. She would be very solid and very adult.

But minutes later she looked at her wrist and saw that he had been more than five minutes. She wished he wouldn't take so long.

When he came down the steps two at a time, she tried not to remember that she hated people who came down steps two at a time. She didn't like the way his hair flopped against his forehead either. And she almost got out of the car when she saw his trousersuit was much too short. It made him look off-balance.

He got into the car. "Don't touch this." He pointed to the starter button. He scowled. "Or this or this or this." He pointed to the pedals, to the gearshift lever. He reached out and heaved his suitcase into her lap. He said brusquely, "Don't let it bump the door panel." A corner dug into her stomach.

And then he turned his head and ignored her. Completely. And she forgot the steps, the hair and the trousersuit and knew she would not get out of the car so long as he was in it.

— SYDNEY VAN SCYOC

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

MY YOUNGER readers, having matured in an era of SF anthologies and TV, may not know that prior to WW II both were of extreme rarity. Aside from two famous volumes of H. G. Wells stories and a handful of quickly out of print single-author collections, there were no short stories to be found outside of magazines. However, the epochal Alamogordo blast resulted in a fallout of literally scores of volumes capitalizing on the sudden keen public interest.

The early anthologies by Conklin, Wollheim et al, drew on the entire field of published works, as does this one:

SPECTRUM, edited by Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest. Harcourt, Brace and World.

Amis, whose name is sufficiently known to be a four-letter (non Anglo-Saxon) word in crossword puzzles, is one of the "noted critics" to be mentioned further on. His *New Maps of Hell*, a friendly critique of SF, divided its readers rather violently into pros and cons.

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His present collaboration is a straightforward anthology whose only restriction was the exclusion of works too well known in Britain. It is a good example of its kind, suffering only from the fact that many of its stories, because of their quality, have been collected before. Heinlein's *By His Bootstraps* is possibly the best known time-paradox ever written. Pohl's almost equally well-known *The Midas Plague* is a humorous spoof that turns our standards of wealth topsy-turvy.

Well, we just have to take the good with the good.

Rating: * * * *

The general field was pretty well dredged when noted anthologist Groff Conklin, former tenant of these pages, came up with the "idea" anthology, in which the book is built around a central theme. Like all good things, his brainstorm was quickly seized upon by others.

One of the best in this category was editor Fadiman's recent *Fantasia Mathematica*. His second in the series is also a mish-mash of stories, cartoons, poems, puzzles, songs and what-not.

MATHEMATICAL MAGPIE edited by Clifton Fadiman. Simon and Schuster.

Isaac Asimov contributes *The Feeling of Power*, a wonderful tongue-in-cheek job. In a far-future civilization in which computers have reigned supreme for millenia, a startling concept arises: "The Dr. tells me that in theory there is nothing the computer can do that the human mind cannot do . . . compare your pocket computer with the massive jobs of a thousand years ago. Why not, then, the last step of doing away with computers altogether?"

Arthur C. Clarke, with two fine stories that also see light further on, James Blish (an *Englishman*, Mr. Fadiman?), Miles J. Breuer's oft-reprinted *The Appendix and the Spectacles*, Mark Clifton, Robert Graves, Bertrand Russell and others are represented.

Rating: * * * *

A development of the past decade or so has been the collection drawn by an editor from the pages of his own magazine.

PROLOGUE TO ANALOG edited by John W. Campbell; THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, ELEVENTH SERIES, edited by Robert P. Mills; THE SIXTH GALAXY READER edited by H. L. Gold. All Doubleday.

It would be unfair to assign individual ratings to these books in the present column. The magazines are the cream of the crop

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and it follows naturally that the collections are also.

The last classification is by author. Such a collection is

FROM THE OCEAN, FROM THE STARS, by Arthur C. Clarke. Harcourt, Brace and World.

Quantitywise, two complete novels, *The City and the Stars* and *The Deep Range,* and twenty-four short stories from *The Other Side of the Sky* fill out the fat pages of Clarke's second omnibus collection *(Across the Sea of Stars* also contained two novels and numerous shorts).

Qualitywise, these stories received top ratings at the time of their first appearance and their present omnibus appearance can only be classed as a windfall.

Now, what if you, my readers, wanted to turn out an "idea" anthology: the works which have had the most profound effect on the science fiction field in the past century, or representative works of authors who have either been most influential in the field or most closely identified with it?

First of all, why restrict it to one hundred years? Well, "The organizing principle of this field since about 1860 has been the idea of science; of knowledge systematically obtained and rationally applied . . . it is a kind of fiction which did not and could not come into existence before the middle of the nineteenth century." This immediately removes from consideration the works of Plato, Lucian of Samosota, Kepler, Cyrano de Bergerac, Bacon and many others who have been considered the grandfathers if not the fathers of the genre.

According to Cyril Kornbluth, "some of the amateur scholars of science fiction are veritable Hitlers for aggrandizing their field. If they perceive in, say, a sixteenth-century satire some vaguely speculative element they see it as a trembling and persecuted minority, demand *Anschluss,* and proceed to annex the satire to science fiction."

Which begs the question: Just what is Science Fiction?

"Science Fiction is a term that H. G. Wells could not have known until long after his 'fantastic and imaginative romances' were published in the 1890's. The thing we are talking about did not come into existence until 1929.

". . . when I first began reading stories like these in the old *Amazing* and *Wonder* . . . we called the stories science-fiction, but the term was not used or understood by the world at large. When respectable critics took notice of the field occasionally . . . they

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called it 'pseudo-science' or 'Buck Rogers stuff' never science fiction.

"Nowadays, the term 'science fiction' has wide currency, and has even lost most of its raffish connotations.

". . . When SF is mentioned by a respected literary figure today, his comments are likely to be informed and friendly — an unheard of thing twenty years ago."

This is all very gratifying, indeed, but it still doesn't define the term. However, "Theodore Sturgeon says, 'A science fiction story is a story built around human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which could not have happened at all without its scientific content.' This definition excludes many stories that are called SF by common consent . . . with one niggling change—inserting 'speculative' before 'scientific' — it cleanly divided true science fiction from even the best imitations."

Now that the decision has been made as to the exact (?) nature of the stories to be included, the only thing remaining is to plan the format that the collection will take. Should you use the historical approach, demonstrating the evolution of the field chronologically? Should you separate the stories into major categories?

Also, suppose you do not restrict yourself to short stories, even though your planned volume is only a normal 300 pages. To get around this obstacle, suppose you excerpt passages from longer works that are of exceptional interest. Now all that remains to be done is either to send out a frenzied call for help to all your fellow SF friends or settle down to several years of intensive research and reading.

I hope this little exercise in planning has given some idea of the scope and the difficulties involved in such a project.

Is there some editor either brave enough or foolhardy enough to attempt such a brain-busting job? Indeed there is. All the quotations above and the final format are from the actual volume:

A CENTURY OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Damon Knight. Simon and Schuster.

The first impression on being confronted with a volume of this nature is that it is impossible to bring off such a feat successfully. The field is too immense and the sheer mass of verbiage too tremendous to do any sort of justice to it. More power, then to Dauntless Damon for being as successful as he is.

He delves back slightly more than a century, to 1859, for *What Was It?* by Fitz-James O'Brien,

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martyred in his thirties by the Civil War. Though a horror story with supernatural overtones, it is still one of the very earliest examples of true SF.

Jules Verne is represented by the famous "walk on the ocean floor" sequence from 1870's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* certainly a trailblazer of undisputed first rank and still so popular that it has never been out of print since.

According to Knight, the Father of French science fiction is not Papa Verne, but J. H. Rosny âiné, though how he could arrive at this conclusion I do not know, despite the excellence of Rosny's work. Rosny's age was a ripe 14 when *Twenty Thousand Leagues* was published.

There is no defying the quality of Rosny âiné's inventive and sensitive 1895 story, *Another World,* translated and rescued from obscurity by Knight himself. His mutant superman antedates the acknowledged masterwork, Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John,* by a good forty years.

Stapledon's masterpiece, by the way, is included by way of a short, touching excerpt concerning insanity among *Homo Superior.*

H. G. Wells staked out more virgin territory than any other writer in the field before or since. His very first SF yarn, 1895's *The Time Machine,* contains a description of time travel, included by Knight, that has never been equaled.

Knight believes, and I concur, that Well's stature demands another selection. His choice is *The Crystal Egg* of 1897, a little gem about a tantalizing glimpse of life on another world.

Mark Twain's forecast of television supplied the frame for his savagely sarcastic views on "French Justice" as exemplified by the infamous Dreyfus trial in 1898's *From the London Times of 1904.* It is a fine example of one of SF's key roles; as vehicle for pungent socio-political satire.

There is also a selection by the unfortunately short-lived Stanley G. Weinbaum and stories by Ambrose Bierce, Alfred Bester, a beauty of a robot yarn, *Reason,* by Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, a "new-look" Edmond Hamilton, Brian Aldiss, Edgar Pangborn's hauntingly beautiful *Angel's Egg,* Poul Anderson, Frank Herbert, etc. etc.

Knight's selection of modern yarns is good but he has done much better in his choices of antiquities that today's reader would otherwise never have seen.

Rating: * * * * ½.

SF fans! You've never had it so good! —FLOYD C. GALE

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DAY OF TRUCE

Nice neighbors! They'll come to your parties, eat your food and mow your lawn—with TNT!

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Illustrated by GIUNTA

THE EVENING was quiet. There was no sign of the Punks. Silence lay heavily across the barren and eroded acres of the subdivision and there was nothing moving — not even one of the roving and always troublesome dog packs.

It was too quiet, Max Hale decided.

There should have been some motion and some noise. It was as if everyone had taken cover against some known and coming violence—another raid, perhaps. Although there was only one place against which a raid could possibly be aimed. Why should others care, Max wondered; why should they cower indoors, when they had long since surrendered?

Max stood upon the flat lookout-rooftop of the Crawford stronghold and watched the streets to north and west. It was by one of these that Mr. Crawford would be coming home. No one could guess which one, for he seldom used the same road. It was the only way one could cut down the likelihood of ambush or of barricade. Although ambush was less frequent now. There were fewer fences, fewer trees and shrubs; there was almost nothing behind which one could hide. In this barren area it called for real ingenuity to effect an ambuscade. But, Max reminded himself, no one had ever

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charged the Punks with lack of ingenuity.

Mr. Crawford had phoned that he would be late and Max was getting nervous. In another quarter hour, darkness would be closing in. It was bad business to be abroad in Oak Manor after dark had fallen. Or, for that matter, in any of the subdivisions. For while Oak Manor might be a bit more vicious than some of the others of them, it still was typical.

He lifted his glasses again and swept the terrain slowly. There was no sign of patrols or hidden skulkers. There must be watchers somewhere, he knew. There were always watchers, alert to the slightest relaxation of the vigilance maintained at Crawford stronghold.

Street by street he studied the sorry houses, with their broken window panes and their peeling paint, still marked by the soap streaks and the gouges and the red-paint splashes inflicted years before. Here and there dead trees stood stark, denuded of their branches. Browned evergreens, long dead, stood rooted in the dusty yards — yards long since robbed of the grass that once had made them lawns.

And on the hilltop, up on Circle Drive, stood the ruins of Thompson stronghold, which had fallen almost five years before. There was no structure standing. It had been leveled stone by stone and board by board. Only the smashed and dying trees, only the twisted steel fence posts marked where it had been.

Now Crawford stronghold stood alone in Oak Manor. Max thought of it with a glow of pride and a surge of painful memory. It stood because of him, he thought, and he would keep it standing.

IN THIS desert it was the last oasis, with its trees and grass, with its summer houses and trellises, with the massive shrubbery and the wondrous sun dial beside the patio, with its goldfish-and-lily pond and the splashing fountain.

"Max," said the walkie-talkie strapped across his chest.

"Yes, Mr. Crawford."

"Where are you located, Max?"

"Up on the lookout, sir."

"I'll come in on Seymour Drive," said Mr. Crawford's voice. "I'm about a mile beyond the hilltop. I'll be coming fast."

"The coast seems to be quite clear, sir."

"Good. But take no chances with the gates."

"I have the control box with me, sir. I can operate from here. I will keep a sharp lookout."

"Be seeing you," said Crawford.

Max picked up the remote con-

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trol box and waited for his returning master.

The car came over the hill and streaked down Seymour Drive, made its right-hand turn on Dawn, roared toward the gates.

When it was no more than a dozen feet away, Max pushed the button that unlocked the gates. The heavy bumper slammed into them and pushed them open. The buffers that ran along each side of the car held them aside as the machine rushed through. When the car had cleared them, heavy springs snapped them shut and they were locked again.

Max slung the control-box strap over his shoulder and went along the rooftop catwalk to the ladder leading to the ground.

Mr. Crawford had put away the car and was closing the garage door as Max came around the corner of the house.

"It does seem quiet," said Mr. Crawford. "Much quieter, it would seem to me, than usual."

"I don't like it, sir. There is something brewing."

"Not very likely," said Mr. Crawford. "Not on the eve of Truce Day."

"I wouldn't put nothing past them dirty Punks," said Max.

"I quite agree," said Mr. Crawford, "but they'll be coming here tomorrow for their day of fun. We must treat them well for, after all, they're neighbors and it is a custom. I would hate to have you carried beyond the bounds of propriety by overzealousness."

"You know well and good," protested Max, "I would never do a thing. I am a fighter, sir, but I fight fair and honorable."

Mr. Crawford said, "I was thinking of the little gambit you had cooked up last year."

"It would not have hurt them, sir. Leastwise, not permanently. They might never have suspected. Just a drop or two of it in the fruit punch was all we would have needed. It wouldn't have taken effect until hours after they had left. Slow-acting stuff, it was."

"Even so," said Mr. Crawford sternly, "I am glad I found out in time. And I don't want a repeat performance, possibly more subtle, to be tried this year. I hope you understand me."

"Oh, certainly, sir," said Max. "You can rely upon it, sir."

"Well, good night, then. I'll see you in the morning."

IT WAS all damn foolishness, thought Max — this business of a Day of Truce. It was an old holdover from the early days when some do-gooder had figured maybe there would be some benefit if the stronghold people and the Punks could meet

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under happy circumstance and spend a holiday together.

It worked, of course, but only for the day. For twenty-four hours there were no raids, no flaming arrows, no bombs across the fence. But at one second after midnight, the feud took up again, as bitter and relentless as it had ever been.

It had been going on for years. Max had no illusions about how it all would end. Some day Crawford stronghold would fall, as had all the others in Oak Manor. But until that day, he pledged himself to do everything he could. He would never lower his guard nor relax his vigilance. Up to the very end he would make them smart for every move they made.

He watched as Mr. Crawford opened the front door and went across the splash of light that flowed out from the hall. Then the door shut and the house stood there, big and bleak and black, without a sliver of light showing anywhere. No light ever showed from the Crawford house. Well before the fall of night he always threw the lever on the big control board to slam steel shutters closed against all the windows in the place. Lighted windows made too good a nighttime target.

Now the raids always came at night. There had been a time when some had been made in daylight, but that was too chancy now. Year by year, the defenses had been built up to a point where an attack in daylight was plain foolhardiness.

Max turned and went down the driveway to the gates. He drew on rubber gloves and with a small flashlight examined the locking mechanism. It was locked. It had never failed, but there might come a time it would. He never failed to check it once the gates had closed.

He stood beside the gates and listened. Everything was quiet, although he imagined he could hear the faint singing of the electric current running through the fence. But that, he knew, was impossible, for the current was silent.

He reached out with a gloved hand and stroked the fence. Eight feet high, he told himself, with a foot of barbed wire along the top of it, and every inch of it alive with the surging current.

And inside of it a standby, auxiliary fence into which current could be introduced if the forward fence should fail.

A CLICKING sound came padding down the driveway and Max turned from the gate.

"How you, boy," he said.

It was too dark for him to see the dog, but he could hear

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it snuffling and snorting with pleasure at his recognition.

It came bumbling out of the darkness and pushed against his legs. He squatted down and put his arms about it. It kissed him sloppily.

"Where are the others, boy?" he asked, and it wriggled in its pleasure.

Great dogs, he thought. They loved the people in the stronghold almost to adoration, but had an utter hatred for every other person. They had been trained to have.

The rest of the pack, he knew, was aprowl about the yard, alert to every sound, keyed to every presence. No one could approach the fence without their knowing it. Any stranger who got across the fence they would rip to bits.

He stripped off the rubber gloves and put them in his pocket.

"Come on, boy," he said.

He turned off the driveway and proceeded across the yard — cautiously, for it was uneven footing. There was no inch of it that lay upon the level. It was cleverly designed so that any thrown grenade or Molotov cocktail would roll into a deep and narrow bomb trap.

There had been a time, he recalled, when there had been a lot of these things coming over the fence. There were fewer now, for it was a waste of effort. There had been a time, as well, when there had been flaming arrows, but these had tapered off since the house had been fireproofed.

He reached the side yard and stopped for a moment, listening, with the dog standing quietly at his side. A slight wind had come up and the trees were rustling. He lifted his head and stared at the delicate darkness of them, outlined against the lighter sky.

Beautiful things, he thought. It was a pity there were not more of them. Once this area had been named Oak Manor for the stately trees that grew here. There, just ahead of him, was the last of them—a rugged old patriarch with its massive crown blotting out the early stars.

He looked at it with awe and appreciation — and with apprehension, too. It was a menace. It was old and brittle and it should be taken down, for it leaned toward the fence and some day a windstorm might topple it across the wire. He should have mentioned it long ago to Mr. Crawford, but he knew the owner held this tree in a sentimental regard that matched his own. Perhaps it could be made safe by guy-wires to hold it against the wind, or at least to turn its fall away from the fence should it be broken or uprooted. Although it seemed a sacrilege to anchor it

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with guywires, an insult to an ancient monarch.

He moved on slowly, threading through the bomb traps, with the dog close at his heels, until he reached the patio and here he stopped beside the sun dial. He ran his hand across its rough stone surface and wondered why Mr. Crawford should set such a store by it. Perhaps because it was a link to the olden days before the Punks and raids. It was an old piece that had been brought from a monastery garden somewhere in France. That in itself, of course, would make it valuable. But perhaps Mr. Crawford saw in it another value, far beyond the fact that it was hundreds of years old and had come across the water.

Perhaps it had grown to symbolize for him the day now past when any man might have a sun dial in his garden, when he might have trees and grass without fighting for them, when he might take conscious pride in the unfenced and unmolested land that lay about his house.

Bit by bit, through the running years, those rights had been eroded.

II

FIRST it had been the little things—the casual, thoughtless trampling of the shrubbery by the playing small fry, the killing of the evergreens by the rampaging packs of happy dogs that ran with the playing small fry. For each boy, the parents said, must have himself a dog.

The people in the first place had moved from the jam-packed cities to live in what they fondly called the country, so that they could keep a dog or two and where their children would have fresh air and sunlight and room in which to run.

But too often this country was, *in reality, no more than another* city, with its houses cheek by jowl — each set on acre or half-acre lots, but still existing cheek by jowl.

Of course, a place to run. The children had. But no more than a place to run. There was nothing more to do. Run was all they could do — up and down the streets, back and forth across the lawns, up and down the driveways, leaving havoc in their trail. And in time the toddlers grew up and in their teen-age years they still could only run. There was no place for them to go, nothing they might do. Their mothers foregathered every morning at the coffee klatches and their fathers sat each evening in the backyards drinking beer. The family car could not be used because gasoline cost money and the mortgages were

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heavy and the taxes terrible and the other costs were high.

So to find an outlet for their energies, to work off their unrealized resentments against having nothing they could do, these older fry started out, for pure excitement only, on adventures in vandalism. There was a cutting of the backyard clotheslines, a chopping into bits of watering hoses left out overnight, a breaking and ripping up of the patios, ringing of the doorbells, smashing of the windows, streaking of the siding with a cake of soap, splashing with red paint.

Resentments had been manufactured to justify this vandalism and now the resentments were given food to grow upon. Irate owners erected fences to keep out the children and the dogs, and this at once became an insult and a challenge.

And that first simple fence, Max told himself, had been the forerunner of the eight-foot barrier of electricity which formed the first line of defense in the Crawford stronghold. Likewise, those small-time soap-cake vandals, shrieking their delight at messing up a neighbor's house, had been the ancestors of the Punks.

HE left the patio and went down the stretch of backyard, past the goldfish-and-lily pond and the tinkling of the fountain, past the clump of weeping willows, and so out to the fence.

"Psst!" said a voice just across the fence.

"That you, Billy?"

"It's me," said Billy Warner.

"All right. Tell me what you have."

"Tomorrow is Truce Day and we'll be visiting . . ."

"I know all that," said Max.

"They're bringing in a time bomb."

"They can't do that," said Max, disgusted. "The cops will frisk them at the gates. They would spot it on them."

"It'll be all broken down. Each one will have a piece. Stony Stafford hands out the parts tonight. He has a crew that has been practicing for weeks to put a bomb together fast — even in the dark, if need be."

"Yeah," said Max, "I guess they could do it that way. And once they get it put together?"

"The sun dial," Billy said. "Underneath the sun dial."

"Well, thanks," said Max. "I am glad to know. It would break the boss' heart should something happen to the sun dial."

"I figure," Billy said, "this might be worth a twenty."

"Yes," Max agreed. "Yes, I guess it would."

"If they ever knew I told,

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they'd take me out and kill me."

"They won't ever know," said Max. "I won't ever tell them."

He pulled his wallet from his pocket, turned on the flash and found a pair of tens.

He folded the bills together, lengthwise, twice. Then he shoved them through an opening in the fence.

"Careful, there," he cautioned. "Do not touch the wire."

Beyond the fence he could see the faint, white outline of the other's face. And a moment later, the hand that reached out carefully and grabbed the corner of the folded bills.

Max did not let loose of the money immediately. They stood, each of them, with their grip upon the bills.

"Billy," said Max, solemnly, "you would never kid me, would you? You would never sell me out. You would never feed me erroneous information."

"You know me, Max," said Billy. "I've played square with you. I'd never do a thing like that."

Max let go of the money and let the other have it.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Billy. Keep on playing square. For the day you don't, I'll come out of here and hunt you down and cut your throat myself."

But the informer did not answer. He was already moving off, out into the deeper darkness.

MAX stood quietly, listening. The wind still blew in the leaves and the fountain kept on splashing, like gladsome silver bells.

"Hi, boy," Max said softly, but there was no snuffling answer. The dog had left him, was prowling with the others up and down the yard.

Max turned about and went up the yard toward the front again, completing his circuit of the house. As he rounded the corner of the garage, a police car was slowing to a halt before the gates.

He started down the drive, moving ponderously and deliberately.

"That you, Charley?" he called softly.

"Yes, Max," said Charley Pollard. "Is everything all right?"

"Right as rain," said Max.

He approached the gates and saw the bulky loom of the officer on the other side.

"Just dropping by," said Pollard. "The area is quiet tonight. We'll be coming by one of these days to inspect the place. It looks to me you're loaded."

"Not a thing illegal," Max declared. "All of it's defensive. That is still the rule."

"Yes, that is the rule," said

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Pollard, "but it seems to me that there are times you become a mite too enthusiastic. A full load in the fence, no doubt."

"Why, certainly," said Max. "Would you have it otherwise?"

"A kid grabs hold of it and he could be electrocuted, at full strength."

"Would you rather I had it set just to tickle them?"

"You're playing too rough, Max."

"I doubt it rather much," said Max. "I watched from here, five years ago, when they stormed Thompson stronghold. Did you happen to see that?"

"I wasn't here five years ago. My beat was Farview Acres."

"They took it apart," Max told him. "Stone by stone, brick by brick, timber by timber. They left nothing standing. They left nothing whole. They cut down all the trees and chopped them up. They uprooted all the shrubs. They hoed out all the flower beds. They made a desert of it. They reduced it to their level. And I'm not about to let it happen here, not if I can help it. A man has got the right to grow a tree and a patch of grass. If he wants a flower bed, he has a right to have a flower bed. You may not think so, but he's even got the right to keep other people out."

"Yes," said the officer, "all you say is true. But these are kids you are dealing with. There must be allowances. And this is a neighborhood. You folks and the others like you wouldn't have this trouble if you only tried to be a little neighborly."

"WE DON'T dare be neighborly," said Max. "Not in a place like this. In Oak Manor, and in all the other manors and all the other acres and the other whatever-you-may-call-thems, neighborliness means that you let people overrun you. Neighborliness means you give up your right to live your life the way you want to live it. This kind of neighborliness is rooted way back in those days when the kids made a path across your lawn as a shortcut to the school bus and you couldn't say a thing for fear that they would sass you back and so create a scene. It started when your neighbor borrowed your lawn mower and forgot to bring it back and when you went to get it you found that he had broken it. But he pretended that he hadn't and, for the sake of neighborliness, you didn't have the guts to tell him that he had and to demand that he pay the bill for the repairing of it."

"Well, maybe so," said Pollard, "but it's gotten out of hand. It has been carried too far. You

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folks have got too high and mighty."

"There's a simple answer to everything," Max told him stoutly. "Get the Punks to lay off us and we'll take down the fence and all the other stuff."

Pollard shook his head. "It has gone too far," he said. "There is nothing anyone can do."

He started to go back to the car, then turned back.

"I forgot," he said. "Tomorrow is your Truce Day. Myself and a couple of the other men will be here early in the morning."

Max didn't answer. He stood in the driveway and watched the car pull off down the street. Then he went up the driveway and around the house to the back door.

Nora had a place laid at the table for him and he sat down heavily, glad to be off his feet. By this time of the evening he was always tired. Not as young, he thought, as he once had been.

"You're late tonight," said the cook, bringing him the food. "Is everything all right?"

"I guess so. Everything is quiet. But we may have trouble tomorrow. They're bringing in a bomb."

"A bomb!" cried Nora. "What will you do about it? Call in the police, perhaps."

Max shook his head. "No, I can't do that. The police aren't on our side. They'd take the attitude we'd egged on the Punks until they had no choice but to bring in the bomb. We are on our own. And, besides, I must protect the lad who told me. If I didn't, the Punks would know and he'd be worthless to me then. He'd never get to know another thing. But knowing they are bringing something in, I can watch for it."

He still felt uneasy about it all, he realized. Not about the bomb itself, perhaps, but something else, something that was connected with it. He wondered why he had this feeling. Knowing about the bomb, he all but had it made. All he'd have to do would be to locate it and dig it out from beneath the sun dial. He would have the time to do it. The day-long celebration would end at six in the evening and the Punks could not set the bomb to explode earlier than midnight. Any blast before midnight would be a violation of the truce.

HE SCOOPED fried potatoes from the dish onto his plate and speared a piece of meat. Nora poured his coffee and, pulling out a chair, sat down opposite him.

"You aren't eating?" he asked.

"I ate early, Max."

He ate hungrily and hurriedly, for there still were things to do.

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She sat and watched him eat. The clock on the kitchen wall ticked loudly in the silence.

Finally she said: "It is getting somewhat grim, Max."

He nodded, his mouth full of food and unable to speak.

"I don't see," said the cook, "why the Crawfords want to stay here. There can't be much pleasure in it for them. They could move into the city and it would be safer there. There are the juvenile gangs, of course, but they mostly fight among themselves. They don't make life unbearable for all the other people."

"It's pride," said Max. "They won't give up. They won't let Oak Manor beat them. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford are quality. They have some steel in them."

"They couldn't sell the place, of course," said Nora. "There would no one buy it. But they don't need the money. They could just walk away from it."

"You misjudge them, Nora. The Crawfords in all their lives have never walked away from anything. They went through a lot to live here. Sending Johnny off to boarding school when he was a lad, since it wouldn't have been safe for him to go to school with the Punks out there. I don't suppose they like it. I don't see how they could. But they won't be driven out. They realize someone must stand up to all that trash out there, or else there's no hope."

Nora sighed. "I suppose you're right. But it is a shame. They could live so safe and comfortable and normal if they just moved to the city."

He finished eating and got up.

"It was a good meal, Nora," he said. "But then you always fix good meals."

"Ah, go on with you," said Nora.

He went into the basement and sat down before the shortwave set. Systematically, he started putting in his calls to the other strongholds. Wilson stronghold, over in Fair Hills, had had a little trouble early in the evening—a few stink bombs heaved across the fence — but it had quieted down. Jackson stronghold did not answer. While he was trying to get through to Smith stronghold in Harmony Settlement, Curtis stronghold in Lakeside Heights began calling him. Everything was quiet, John Hennessey, the Curtis custodian told him. It had been quiet for several days.

He stayed at the radio for an hour and by that time had talked with all the nearby strongholds. There had been scattered trouble here and there, but nothing of any consequence. Generally it was peaceful.

He sat and thought about the

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time bomb and there was still that nagging worry. There was something wrong, he knew, but he could not put his finger on it.

GETTING up, he prowled the cavernous basement, checking the defense material — extra sections of fencing, piles of posts, pointed stakes, rolls of barb wire, heavy flexible wire mesh and all the other items for which some day there might be a need. Tucked into one corner, hidden, he found the stacked carboys of acid he had secretly cached away. Mr. Crawford would not approve, he knew, but if the chips ever should be down, and there was need to use those carboys, he might be glad to have them.

He climbed the stairs and went outside to prowl restlessly about the yard, still upset by that nagging something about the bomb he could not yet pin down.

The moon had risen. The yard was a place of interlaced light and shadow, but beyond the fence the desert acres that held the other houses lay flat and bare and plain, without a shadow on them except the shadows of the houses.

Two of the dogs came up and passed the time of night with him and then went off into the shrubbery.

He moved into the backyard and stood beside the sun dial.

The wrongness still was there. Something about the sun dial and the bomb — some piece of thinking that didn't run quite true.

He wondered how they knew that the destruction of the sun dial would be a heavy blow to the owner of the stronghold. How could they possibly have known?

The answer seemed to be that they couldn't. They didn't. There was no way for them to know. And even if, in some manner, they had learned, a sun dial most certainly would be a piddling thing to blow up when that single bomb could be used so much better somewhere else.

Stony Stafford, the leader of the Punks, was nobody's fool. He was a weasel — full of cunning, full of savvy. He'd not mess with any sun dial when there was so much else that a bomb could do so much more effectively.

And as he stood there beside the sun dial, Max knew where that bomb would go — knew where he would plant it were he in Stafford's place.

At the roots of that ancient oak which leaned toward the fence.

He stood and thought about it and knew that he was right.

Billy Warner, he wondered. Had Billy double-crossed him?

Very possibly he hadn't. Perhaps Stony Stafford might have

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suspected long ago that his gang harbored an informer and, for that reason, had given out the story of the sun dial rather than the oak tree. And that, of course, only to a select inner circle which would be personally involved with the placing of the bomb.

In such a case, he thought, Billy Warner had not done too badly.

Max turned around and went back to the house, walking heavily. He climbed the stairs to his attic room and went to bed. It had been, he thought just before he went to sleep, a fairly decent day.

III

THE police showed up at eight o'clock. The carpenters came and put up the dance platform. The musicians appeared and began their tuning up. The caterers arrived and set up the tables, loading them with food and two huge punch bowls, standing by to serve.

Shortly after nine o'clock the Punks and their girls began to straggle in. The police frisked them at the gates and found no blackjacks, no brass knuckles, no bicycle chains on any one of them.

The band struck up. The Punks and their girls began to dance. They strolled through the yard and admired the flowers, without picking any of them. They sat on the grass and talked and laughed among themselves. They gathered at the overflowing boards and ate. They laughed and whooped and frolicked and everything was fine.

"You see?" Pollard said to Max. "There ain't nothing wrong with them. Give them a decent break and they're just a bunch of ordinary kids. A little hell in them, of course, but nothing really bad. It's your flaunting of this place in their very faces that makes them the way they are."

"Yeah," said Max.

He left Pollard and drifted down the yard, keeping as inconspicuous as he could. He wanted to watch the oak, but he knew he didn't dare to. He knew he had to keep away from it, should not even glance toward it. If he should scare them off, then God only knew where they would plant the bomb. He thought of being forced to hunt wildly for it after they were gone and shuddered at the thought.

There was no one near the bench at the back of the yard, near the flowering almond tree, and he stretched out on it. It wasn't particularly comfortable, but the day was warm and the air was drowsy. He dropped off to sleep.

When he woke he saw that a

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man was standing on the gravel path just beyond the bench.

He blinked hard and rubbed his eyes.

"Hello, Max," said Stony Stafford.

"You should be up there dancing, Stony."

"I was waiting for you to wake up," said Stony. "You are a heavy sleeper. I could of broke your neck."

Max sat up. He rubbed a hand across his face.

"Not on Truce Day, Stony. We all are friends on Truce Day."

Stony spat upon the gravel path.

"Some other day," he said.

"Look," said Max, "why don't you just run off and forget about it? You'll break your back if you try to crack this place. Pick up your marbles, Stony, and go find someone else who's not so rough to play with."

"Some day we'll make it," Stony said. "This place can't stand forever."

"You haven't got a chance," said Max.

"Maybe so," said Stony. "But I think we will. And before we do, there is just one thing I want you to know. You think nothing will happen to you even if we do. You think that all we'll do is just rip up the place, not harming anyone. But you're wrong, Max. We'll do it the way it is supposed to be with the Crawfords and with Nora. We won't hurt them none. But we'll get you, Max. Just because we can't carry knives or guns doesn't mean there aren't other ways. There'll be a stone fall on you or a timber hit you. Or maybe you'll stumble and fall into the fire. There are a lot of ways to do it and we plan to get you plenty."

"So," said Max, "you hate me. It makes me feel real bad."

"Two of my boys are dead," said Stony. "There are others who are crippled pretty bad."

"There wouldn't nothing happen to them, Stony, if you didn't send them up against the fence."

He looked up and saw the hatred that lay in Stony Stafford's eyes, but washing across the hatred was a gleam of triumph.

"Good-by, dead man," said Stony.

He turned and stalked away.

MAX sat quietly on the bench, remembering that gleam of triumph in Stony Stafford's eyes. And that meant he had been right. Stony had something up his sleeve and it could be nothing else but the bomb beneath the oak.

The day wore on. In the afternoon, Max went up to the house and into the kitchen. Nora fixed him a sandwich, grumbling.

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"Why don't you go out and eat off the tables?" she demanded. "There is plenty there."

"Just as soon keep out of their way," said Max. "I have to fight them all the rest of the year. I don't see why I should pal up with them today."

"What about the bomb?"

"Shhh," said Max. "I know where it is."

Nora stood looking out the window. "They don't look like bad kids," she said. "Why can't we make a peace of some sort with them?"

Max grunted. "It's gone too far," he said.

Pollard had been right, he thought. It was out of hand. Neither side could back down now.

The police could have put a stop to it to start with, many years ago, if they had cracked down on the vandals instead of adopting a kids-will-be-kids attitude and shrugging it all off as just an aggravated case of quarreling in the neighborhood. The parents could have stopped it by paying some attention to the kids, by giving them something that would have stopped their running wild. The community could have put a stop to it by providing some sort of recreational facilities.

But no one had put a stop to it. No one had even tried.

And now it had grown to be a way of life and it must be fought out to the bitter end.

Max had no illusions as to who would be the winner.

Six o'clock came and the Punks started drifting off. By six thirty the last of them had gone. The musicians packed up their instruments and left. The caterers put away their dishes and scooped up the leftovers and the garbage and drove away. The carpenters came and got their lumber. Max went down to the gates and checked to see that they were locked.

"Not a bad day," said Pollard, speaking through the gates to Max. "They really aren't bad kids, if you'd just get to know them."

"I know them plenty now," said Max.

He watched the police car drive off, then turned back up the driveway.

HE'D have to wait for a while, he knew, until the dusk could grow a little deeper, before he started looking for the bomb. There would be watchers outside the fence. It would be just as well if they didn't know that he had found it. It might serve a better purpose if they could be left to wonder if it might have been a dud. For one thing, it would shake their confidence. For

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another, it would protect young Billy Warner. And while Max could feel no admiration for the kid, Billy had been useful in the past and still might be useful in the future.

He went down to the patio and crawled through the masking shrubbery until he was only a short distance from the oak.

He waited there, watching the area out beyond the fence. There was as yet no sign of life out there. But they would be out there watching. He was sure of that.

The dusk grew deeper and he knew he could wait no longer. Creeping cautiously, he made his way to the oak. Carefully, he brushed away the grass and leaves, face held close above the ground.

Halfway around the tree, he found it — the newly upturned earth, covered by a sprinkling of grass and leaves, and positioned neatly between two heavy roots.

He thrust his hand against the coolness of the dirt and his fingers touched the metal. Feeling it, he froze, then very slowly, very gently, pulled his hand away.

He sat back on his heels and draw in a measured breath.

The bomb was there, all right, just as he had suspected. But set above it, protecting it, was a contact bomb. Try to get the time bomb out and the contact bomb would be triggered off.

He brushed his hands together, wiping off the dirt.

There was, he knew, no way to get out the bombs. He had to let them stay. There was nothing he could do about it.

No wonder Stony's eyes had shown a gleam of triumph. For there was more involved than just a simple time bomb. This was a foolproof setup. There was nothing that could be done about it. If it had not been for the roots, Max thought, he might have taken a chance on working from one side and digging it all out. But with the heavy roots protecting it, that was impossible.

Stony might have known that he knew about it and then had gone ahead, working out a bomb set that no one would dare to mess around with.

It was exactly the sort of thing that would be up Stony's alley. More than likely, he was setting out there now, chuckling to himself.

MAX stayed squatted, thinking.

He could string a line of mesh a few feet inside the tree, curving out to meet the auxiliary fence on either side. Juice could be fed into it and it might serve as a secondary defense. But it was not good insurance. A determined

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rush would carry it, for at best it would be flimsy. He'd not be able to install it as he should, working in the dark.

Or he could rig the tree with guywires to hold it off the fence when it came crashing down. And that, he told himself, might be the thing to do.

He got up and went around the house, heading for the basement to look up some wire that might serve to hold the tree.

He remembered, as he walked past the short wave set, that he should be sitting in on the regular evening check among the nearby strongholds. But it would have to wait tonight.

He walked on and then stopped suddenly as the thought came to him. He stood for a moment, undecided, then swung around and went back to the set.

He snapped on the power and turned it up.

He'd have to be careful what he said, he thought, for there was the chance the Punks might be monitoring the channels.

John Hennessey, custodian of the Curtis stronghold, came in a few seconds after Max had started calling.

"Something wrong, Max?"

"Nothing wrong, John. I was just wondering — do you remember telling me about those toys that you have?"

"Toys?"

"Yeah. The rattles."

He could hear the sound of Hennessey sucking in his breath.

Finally he said: "Oh, those. Yes, I still have them."

"How many would you say?"

"A hundred, probably. Maybe more than that."

"Could I borrow them?"

"Sure," said Hennessey. "Would you want them right away?"

"If you could," said Max.

"Okay. You'll pick them up?"

"I'm a little busy."

"Watch for me," said Hennessey. "I'll box them up and be there in an hour."

"Thanks, John," said Max.

Was it wrong? he wondered. Was it too much of a chance?

Perhaps he didn't have the right to take any chance at all.

But you couldn't sit forever, simply fending off the Punks. For if that was all you did, they'd keep on coming back. But hit back hard at them and they might get a belly full. You might end it once for all. The trouble was, he thought, you could strike back so seldom. You could never act except defensively, for if you took any other kind of action, the police were down on you like a ton of bricks.

He licked his lips.

It was seldom one had a chance like this — a chance to strike back lustily and still be legally defensive.

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IV

HE GOT up quickly and walked to the rear of the basement, where he found the heavy flexible mesh. He carried out three rolls of it and a loop of heavy wire to hang it on. He'd have to use some trees to stretch out the wire. He really should use some padding to protect the trees against abrasion by the wire, but he didn't have the time.

Working swiftly, he strung the wire, hung the mesh upon it, pegged the bottom of the mesh tight against the ground, tied the ends of it in with the auxiliary fence.

He was waiting at the gates when the truck pulled up. He used the control box to open the gates and the truck came through. Hennessey got out.

"Outside is swarming with Punks," he told Max. "What is going on?"

"I got troubles," said Max.

Hennessey went around to the back of the truck and lowered the tail gate. Three large boxes, with mesh insets, rested on the truck bed.

"They're in there?" asked Max.

Hennessey nodded. "I'll give you a hand with them."

Between them they lugged the boxes to the mesh curtain, rigged behind the oak.

"I left one place unpegged," said Max. "We can push the boxes under."

"I'll unlock the lids first," said Hennessey. "We can reach through with the pole and lift the lids if they are unlocked. Then use the pole again to tip the boxes over."

They slid the boxes underneath the curtain, one by one. Hennessey went back to the truck to get the pole. Max pegged down the gap.

"Can you give me a bit of light?" asked Hennessey. "I know the Punks are waiting out there. But probably they'd not notice just a squirt of it. They might think you were making just a regular inspection of the grounds."

Max flashed the light and Hennessey, working with the pole thrust through the mesh, flipped back the lids. Carefully, he tipped the boxes over. A dry slithering and frantic threshing sounds came out of the dark.

"They'll be nasty customers," said Hennessey. "They'll be stirred up and angry. They'll do a lot of circulating, trying to get settled for the night and that way, they'll get spread out. Most of them are big ones. Not many of the small kinds."

He put the pole over his shoulder and the two walked back to the truck.

Max put out his hand and the

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two men shook.

"Thanks a lot, John."

"Glad to do it, Max. Common cause, you know. Wish I could stay around . . ."

"You have a place of your own to watch."

They shook hands once again and Hennessey climbed into the cab.

"You better make it fast the first mile or so," said Max. "Our Punks may be laying for you. They might have recognized you."

"With the bumpers and the power I have," said Hennessey, "I can get through anything."

"And watch out for the cops. They'd raise hell if they knew we were helping back and forth."

"I'll keep an eye for them."

Max opened the gates and the truck backed out, straightened in the road and swiftly shot ahead.

Max listened until it was out of hearing, then checked to see that the gates were locked.

Back in the basement he threw the switch that fed current into the auxiliary fence — and now into the mesh as well.

He sighed with some contentment and climbed the stairs out to the yard.

A SUDDEN flash of light lit up the grounds. He spun swiftly around, then cursed softly at himself. It was only a bird hitting the fence in flight. It happened all the time. He was getting jittery and there was no need of it. Everything was under control — reasonably so.

He climbed a piece of sloping ground and stood behind the oak. Staring into the darkness, it seemed to him that he could see shadowy forms out beyond the fence.

They were gathering out there and they would come swarming in as soon as the tree went down, smashing the fences. Undoubtedly they planned to use the tree as a bridge over the surging current that still would flow in the smashed-down fence.

Maybe it was taking too much of a chance, he thought. Maybe he should have used the guy-wires on the tree. That way there would have been no chance at all. But, likewise, there would have been no opportunity.

They might get through, he thought, but he'd almost bet against it.

He stood there, listening to the angry rustling of a hundred rattlesnakes, touchy and confused, in the area beyond the mesh.

The sound was a most satisfying thing.

He moved away, to be out of the line of blast when the bomb exploded, and waited for the day of truce to end.

— CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

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THE

Illustrated by FINLAY

I

THEY MADE a sort of statue out of the spacesuit, just by not moving it, just by letting it stand there in the back of Turk's Repair Shop, right on the spot where it had gotten Thorens. Not that the rough men of Limbo were the type who'd have any qualms about handling an object with so eerie a history. Nor did they consider it any kind of hoodoo.

It appealed to their sense of humor.

New convicts came to stare at it, and soon it figured in certain colorful practices of initiation. It came to be the subject of a spacemen's ballad, a vulgar ditty intended not to be sung but roared:

Oh-h-h, Svenson's Spacesuit had a hell of a night —
It caught three men, and it mucked 'em up right!

Goldy Svenson absolutely refused to have anything ever to do with the suit again, and so the Patrol issued him another without complaint, knowing that a Swede in space is more trouble than an Irishman once his superstitions have been churned.

The story of that night is no story, for it has no plot. Rather,

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BAD LIFE

There wasn't any middle ground on Limbo. Its people were Saints or Sinners . . . and both were doomed!

by JEROME BIXBY

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it is a few nasty incidents whose only connection is a three-hundred pound, mercury-steel, Space Patrolman's bulger. But, since you ask . . .

THE *MAESTRO* was old, vintage 2080 or so. The contralto whose voice swelled from it had died long before that, around 1970. The song was a wiring of one of those antique modulated-groove "records" that gave their impulse to a "needle" and thence to a diaphragm-type speaker. Thorens could faintly hear the "surface-noise" behind the music . . . sweet and low, sweet and low:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child —

Thorens' discolored, half-closed left eye ached. He held his drink to his lips, elbow on table, his head bent forward a little over the soiled cloth. This shielded his face from the lamp overhead and kept Turk and the others from seeing the tears that might trigger one of them — or all of them — into coming over and knocking his head off.

Far — far — from home . . .

Thorens' chin moved under its sandy beard as he tried to soften the lump that was hurting his throat. He took a quick unpleasing sip of the whiskey, winced as it knifed into his cut lips, set the glass on the table. Then he looked hesitantly at Turk, knowing somehow that the fat man was studying him.

Five months on Limbo had taught him that the best defense was a reasonable pretense. He cleared his throat and said falteringly, "Kind of gets you, doesn't it?"

Turk stared at him unwinkingly. Thorens' eyes sheered away, ran the length of the floor, up and along the dirty mirror that hung behind the bar — in it, his own reflection, dark shadows and smudgy faces, dingy chromium, the amber monotony of bottles, cigarette and marijuana smoke coiling, the spider-shaped bloodstain on the wall where the little Spaniard's high blood-pressure had geysered through his cut throat.

"It don't get me," Turk rumbled. He got up, wheezing, flat dark face glistening, carefully plucked eyebrows arched into the satanic shape that pleased him. "This is home. Don' you like Limbo? I like Limbo. Don' you? You make your friends feel bad!"

THORENS' HEAD lowered again. Turk chuckled and moved to the bar — big, slow man whose bulk had no solidity

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but instead ran to pouches and blobs that bulged sleekly in Limbo's .63 Earth gravity. He thumped for a refill and Potts turned and said sharply, "Keep your pants on, boy. I'll get to you *when*."

Watching them from shadowed eye-sockets, Thorens thought fiercely how stupid they were, with Turk a little more exquisitely so than Potts — and how he loathed them both, and feared them both, as he loathed and feared all the half-men here on Limbo.

Suddenly Thorens closed his eyes, making the shadowed eye-sockets darker . . . the old, old fear that somebody was reading his mind. Not really *reading* it, but detecting from visible signs what his thoughts were about. Covertly he brushed a hand across his forehead, up into his thin hair, down again, bringing with it a workable shield of hair from behind which his eyes flickered, searching for the clenched fist, the boot, the knife —

Nothing. Shadows. Men drinking.

He released his hate. It filled his mind and exploded against the far corners of his skull. *Turk — fat strong-arm artist, with glands for brains! Potts — wife carver! Of all on Limbo, I hate you most!* His eyes flickered again. They hadn't "heard." He sat there, hating. *Why do I hate you most? Because you have hurt me most . . .*

"I ain't a boy," Turk said. He leaned over the bar, his belly rolling onto it like a squeezed balloon. "I'm a man."

Potts spun a beer at him. Turk picked it up and turned around. His muddy eyes brushed Thorens, and he decided to sit elsewhere. He went over to the front window, where there was a booth that Potts kept a little neater and cleaner because business was still business, even on Limbo, and sat down, inching himself along until he sat almost pressing the window.

Thorens was reminded of a captive hippo, stinking and streaked, looking dully through bars at a world it hadn't the brains to realize was there and strange.

"I bet he's a liar," said one of the men at the bar. The man turned toward Turk, hand on knife. He was drunk and out to bury his steel — his left hand made the challenge-sign. "Tell us what you are."

TURK DIDN'T look at him. "No good, Sammy. Old Turk's too slow for knives." (He carried spring-knives up his sleeves, but the other was too far away. *Just a little closer.*

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Sammy, he chuckled silently to himself.)

"Y'ain't too slow to bleed."

Another man said, from the shadows, "Sammy, is it? Well, I'm a stranger here, Sammy, and I don't know you — but I'll tell you something. I'm not too slow."

Sammy's knife was out. "You know what else you are?"

"Not slow."

They moved toward each other, coming to a crouch. Potts leaned over the bar and broke a bottle of bourbon over Sammy's head. Sammy shrieked and dropped his knife. He fled for the door, blood and whiskey masking his face.

The stranger drew back his knife for the throw.

Potts said harshly, "Outside, damn it! I run a friendly place. Why do you think I bumped in?"

Sammy slammed through the door. The stranger cursed and followed. Footsteps faded.

Thorens allowed his gaze to fall beyond the specter of knives, out the window and across the glistening concrete roadway and the fog-shrouded fields of tobacco and marijuana to the spaceport. The gray shapes of its administration-building and hangars were beaded with faint strings of window-lights. Its cradles slanted up like fingers pointed at the stars — giant fingers that could unleash the Jovian lightning of rocket-power to reach those stars.

Now a glow washed into Limbo's thin air. It widened and brightened, beating down from the night. The bottles on Potts' shelves behind the bar began to vibrate. The trembling grew, and Thorens shifted as the bench tickled his rear. Men looked up, listened. Potts came around from behind the bar and went to stand beside Turk's table, looking out through the metaglass.

Turk said, not looking at Thorens, "Patrol ship. Maybe the Hand got his transfer. Maybe he'll take off pretty soon. Maybe he wants a so-long present."

Thorens' belly twisted hotly into itself. He kept his face down, eyes in hiding. The whiskey in the bottom of his glass danced. His trembling hand forced the glass flat on the table, released it, fell limp. He sat and waited.

Outside, the glare was bright as day. High in the air a roaring pinpoint appeared, lowering, spitting out light like a fragment of the Sun. Fog boiled around it. Above it the sky was night. As the speck descended, night followed it down through the fog almost respectfully until, as the ship hovered over the pitted apron of the port, its rocket-glare had contracted to a blinding conical affair only a few hundred yards across.

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Thorens dared to glance up. It had been just talk. Turk's heavy features, disinterested in Thorens, were reflected in the window as he looked out.

ROCKET-SOUND thundered, slammed, snarled. The ship touched a cradle, rocked, and the magnetics took hold to fit it tight. The pilot boomed the tubes once, unnecessarily — maybe he was just glad he'd worlded his ship. The boom lit the scene like a flash-bulb, then there was blackness into which the distant dim windows of the port slowly faded as pupils dilated.

Potts was back at his bar, setting up bottles, opening new ones and sticking spouts into them. Solar-system cash was good on Limbo. The wife carver would make money tonight.

A far, faint, dying bleat cut the night. Sammy's? Impossible to tell. Turk gazed dully out the window and Thorens wondered if the man could see in the dark. Nothing of the beast in Turk would surprise him. Turk had forcibly taken a girl, back on Earth — a very young girl — and while he might prefer to be elsewhere than on Limbo, the preference depended on no major discontent. Turk functioned. There were the monthly supply ships, and the frequent stopovers of ships making the Callisto freight-run. There would sometimes be, with so many ships worlding on Limbo, a young and curious passenger who, prepared by the dark lonely months of space, could be persuaded to new adventure. And Turk could be convincing, even likable, when he put his mind to it. He kept, Thorens knew, a small hoard of handkerchiefs, buttons, dog-tags, carefully worded notes, personal jewelry, clothing, souvenirs.

With a hand that was heavier for the ring it had lost, Thorens picked up his drink, mouth twisting bitterly at the rim of the glass. His eyes closed again. He began to assemble words in the darkness, slowly, carefully, picturing them in the cramped pencil strokes that would be realized later when he returned to his office and added them to this manuscript:

> The always dubious coin of sensitivity and intellect amounts to less than ever when you are forty and undersized and alone in a cultural cesspool. Brutality it buys, without being tendered, and ridicule and violation, mixed to a poison whose taste is Fear —

No, no no, he thought — too flowery, too abstruse . . .

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He opened his eyes slightly. In the space of a second they went from side to side, registering the murky room, the men. Then they closed again in hopelessness.

If only I could join you, be one of you, just like you — without conscience or intelligence, as far from God as you are, as close to the slime. Then I would not be set apart — I would not be a target — the hare could run with the hounds. But I could never be like you, or anything like any part of you, you scum, you filth, you animals. I could not be like you in a million years . . .

II

SIXTY YEARS ago the Solar Council, during the tenure as Chairman of the shrewed Ghaz of Venus, had been persuaded to launch Limbo as a money-saving proposition — a prison asteroid, undisciplined and self-sustaining, whose only upkeep would amount to the salaries of a few rookie Patrolmen assigned to orbit their ships within 'scope range and keep a bored eye out . . .

Ah, God! Thorens thought. *Why* had the Helping Hand sent him *here!* Why not to Neptune, or Ganymede, or Callisto, or Tethys, for the frontier duties he had expected when he'd signed on!

Council Engineers had scouted the Trojan Asteroids, selecting at last a body with adequate size and soil — one of the few fragments of Planet X's outer surface that hadn't been blown clean out of the System in that eons-ago catastrophe. Altering the asteroid's core to create a decent gravity, at the same time hopping it up to function as a central heating system, they had atmospherized it, deloused it of inimical micro-organisms, installed a balanced ecology and two weeks later blasted off, leaving some two hundred thousand crates of essentials on its twitching surface. Within another month, every male lifer in the System had been transported to Limbo to fend for himself, each new group being abruptly depleted on arrival by the settling of countless black scores . . .

The Helping Hand! Thorens tore at the words with his mind, shredded them with hate. The great HH! Was he, John Thomas Thorens, on file in some drawer in some office on some level of one of HH's giant headquarters buildings in New Jersey, marked *Discontent — Refer to Transfer?* No, by all the nonexistent gods of Space — not even that! Not even a long wait to be endured, while the wheels of bureaucracy

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ground out his fate. The hated words boiled up out of memory: *Transfer denied. Transfer denied. Transfer denied.*

Within a year Limbo had sprouted landowners, six slapdash towns, a caste system, interurban warfare, and a gang-rule throne whose cushions bore the dark stains of a dozen deposed. Within five, Limbo had shaken down. Gone was the throne, for none could hold it. Warfare had ceased (having been largely a matter of indecisive knife and hatchet forays anyway, no deadlier weapons being permitted). Famine and disease had at last brought the Limbos to the realization that pull together they'd damned well better, or die of perfectly natural causes. A Council of Limbo was formed, a Plan was drawn, some shaky, jury-rigged shops thrown together, some atrocious furniture and fair-to-middling ceramic were produced, and Limbo made an earnest bid for System trade. Sanctioned by the pleased Solar Council, a valid monetary exchange sprang into being, based on Solar dollars but subject to devaluation should Limbo need chastising. The spaceport was built, and a Patrol squadron moved in to sit casually on top of the new order. Limbo bought machinery, parlayed its gains, built factories, manufactured and exported mostly — of all things — toys.

The great HH! . . . which "Watched Over its Flock in Distress and Disaster" (*Our Hands Are on Venus, and They're Helping on Mars*), but which could not note the predicament of one lone, terror-bound field-worker, nor stretch red tape to free him, in its concentration on its main objective: Campaign and Collect (*And They'll Be Right There. When We Reach — the — Stars!*).

THORENS sought to assemble saliva in his dry mouth, wishing he could spit his hatred.

Helping along the frontiers, maybe, where the seed of publicity might be planted to bear plump financial fruit at home — but certain as death it was that no HH benevolence ever came this way, out across space to Thorens' rat-hole office on Limbo where he was a Beam of Light in the Outer Darkness.

Eventually, there being plenty of room, the life-term inmates of the Tycho Women's Penitentiary were removed to Limbo, there to live beside and among the males to the satisfaction of both.

Thus Limbo functioned — unpoliced, autonomous, even profitable. There was no slightest sign of moral or spiritual rehabilitation among its populace, how-

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ever. If the Limbos applied themselves to the matter of collective survival, it was only that they might survive as happy hellhounds in the biggest, goriest padded cell in history. Limbo outdid in sheer social savagery any lawless frontier that had ever existed. Frontiers always attract a percentage of misfits, outcasts and crackpots; but here was saturation. Dog snapped, snarled, chewed and eagerly ate dog. Murder was the way of life. To hear a scream was to shrug at somebody's clumsiness, for it is simple to kill quietly. To step in blood was to curse, for it rots shoes.

The largest town was Damn Earth. It had seven sprawling square miles of sloppily paved streets, three hundred and forty-two saloons including Potts', four distilleries, ninety-four gambling palaces, three toy factories, a general warehouse-store, several thousand scattered huts and cabins, seventeen joy-houses (possibly the best living to be made on Limbo), a psychotic German who lived in a cave and collected skulls and the Patrol Spaceport, the latter being the only thing on the tiny planet that the Limbos had not themselves built. About the Spaceport was a network of tall silver towers — a crackling violet wall of death, if need be. But the Limbos displayed no tendency to storm the port, slay its personnel, blast off toward freedom in stolen ships —

They liked Limbo.

It was their oyster, their raw meat, their cup of bloody tea. It was as vicious, as mad, as loose and twisted as they. Paradoxically, it was their prison and the one place between Heaven and Earth where they could roam free, brawl, bay at the stars, kill, live the good life.

ANY NON-LIMBO could, for this reason, walk the streets unescorted in perfect safety. His Visitor's Armband was his shield and security. If he happened on a scene of battle, knives would cease flashing to allow him to pass. And anyone so thoughtless as to threaten him would be cut down by friend and foe alike. For Limbo wanted no reprisals, no curtailments, no kill-joy Patrol teams stalking its surface.

The word regarding visitors was: Leave them alone.

This did not apply to John Thorens —

Who had arrived five months ago, with some thirty books, a few games (checkers, Spacelanes, Guess-an-Element), a three months' salary advance (bait conceals the point on the hook) and a twelve-week course (Encompassing the Humanities) un-

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der his belt that made him a "constructive and rehabilitative force among the unfortunate."

He had busily cleaned the HH office, rousting vermin, painting over filth in cheerful colors. He had then thrown open the doors to the unfortunate, a few of whom took notice.

All the books had been lent out the first day, and were seen no more. The games had generated more interest, but the Limbos played rough. When at first he had sincerely tried to talk up the straight and narrow to these men, he was told that his predecessor had ended up in the quarry with his face torn off, because he'd had brown eyes and the Blue-Eyed Gang collected brown eyes.

(Not precisely so, other Limbos had told him later — the man had disrupted an orgy at the South Pole Arena, with loud complaints that these were Satan's activities. His more specific comments had angered female participants, so they'd dragged him back to Damesville, where, with luck, he eventually managed suicide. When the Patrol investigated, accompanied by an HH representative, they were permitted to discover evidence that the deceased had had a sideline involving a third H, with the catch that the stuff he peddled had been sugared down to substandard. Apparently a customer had complained. End of investigation.)

Thorens naturally had tried to get out. In reply to his first frightened spacegram, HH had said: *Unfortunate demise of predecessor due to involvement in prison intrigue. In no way result of duties you are expected to perform. Patrol denies conditions you describe. Extend the Hand.* The essence of the reply to his second plea was that in view of the contract he had signed it was to be hoped that he might experience a change of sentiment. Extend the Hand.

OUTRAGED, Thorens had sought a more direct means of self-preservation. His HH card brought him to the desk of the secretary of the personal aide to the secretary of the Lieutenant Commander of the Spaceport — a bored-eyed man in neat civvies who had listened carefully to Thorens' story, managing at the same time to make Thorens feel like daddy's little boy, and then, glancing idly out the foot-thick, ray-proof, pellet-proof window at the twisting streets of Damn Earth, candidly admitted that Limbo was a bit rough at first, but, after all, *some* of the Limbos, at least, were struggling along the difficult path toward readjustment and cer-

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tainly deserved a Hand, and all Thorens needed to do to insure his own well-being was to be friendly, mix with those who showed interest, and, above all, keep his nose clean.

To Thorens' last question, as he ushered the Hand out the anything-proof steelite door, the secretary had answered, No, Patrol regulations forbade any civilian communication over Patrol radio apparatus.

Thorens had next systematically buttonholed the captains of the freight ships that sat down every week or so — a simple matter of hanging around bars, since liquor was not permitted aboard ship. He would pay his fare — twice that — ten times that. But soon he came to anticipate their reply: No passage off Limbo without Patrol authorization, HH authorization, authorization, authorization . . .

They had seemed somewhat understanding, however — and one in particular had sympathized. Thorens had promptly tried to stow away on that one's ship, believing he had detected in the man's manner tacit approval of the measure. He was caught and sympathetically turned over to the Patrol. Back in the bored-eyed man's office, he was told that that was scarcely the way to keep his nose clean . . . did he want to end up as a Limbo himself, charged as a stowaway?

"What am I *now?*" Thorens said dully. "They are your prisoners, and I am theirs. Give me sanctuary."

"Nothing will happen to you if you keep your head."

"Do you know what happened to my predecessor's head? Do you see these bruises? Help me!"

"Roughed up a little, eh? Well, I'll tell you, I personally don't think too much missionary zeal will pay off here. Better just sit it out."

"The worst torture is the threats."

"You've been threatened?"

"Every moment is a threat. Every look is a threat. Everyone I meet is a threat. It's not only the bruises . . . God, it's the *fear* of bruises!"

"Fear can do strange things to one's imagination, eh?"

"How often have you been outside these walls? And for how long?"

"I get out occasionally. I don't have much reason —"

"I've told you what is happening."

"Surely you've exaggerated."

USHERED OUT, Thorens cringed against the wall of a hangar, staring around through the ever-night at the vast, waiting, murmuring, neon-lit, death-

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shot psychopathy that was Limbo. Then he darted into the building, into depths cool with the presence of positives — discipline, order, repair, precaution, direction, rational quantities and qualities in rational degree. He veered this way and that through the darkened silver forest of Patrol steel — cranes, engine-pits, fuel storage tanks, machine-shops, great trolleys, giant vaulted ceilings cobwebbed with girders — and hid.

Next morning he was found and ejected.

Temporarily unbalanced, he got drunk. Three bars later, he was smashed. A grinning Limbo shoved a weed under his nose, and Thorens experienced his first flight, during which he challenged three men to a fistic duel and won hands-down when they all collapsed laughing. This was the first, vague, exciting glimpse of the unique "value" he might have to the Limbos. He grabbed at it frantically. He stayed drunk for three days, and bought drinks for the house in every dive from Damn Earth to Saintsville, in an effort to buy more good will as a dividend. He bought pack after pack of reefers from the machines, and distributed them lavishly. He bought six kits of Harrigan's Horse (powder, self-heating water capsule, disposable hardware) in the General Store in Virtue, and gave them to those whom he considered his closest buddies. By this time he had attracted quite a coterie. They wound up their blast by driving to Virgin Springs, down in the southern hemisphere.

The next six hours were quite unforgettable.

Thorens knew this to be true. He tried to forget them — and failed.

III

THE HH records — *all* of them; the records of nineteen years of HH activity on Limbo; quite irreplaceable, if hardly of any significant worth — made quite a fire in the pot-belly stove in Thorens' office. Until the wee hours, he tore the contents of six filing-cabinets and his desk into thumbnail-size pieces and fed them to the flames. He crouched before the pot-belly, face contorted, eyes glazed to a mica finish, mouth busy (pursed, stretched to gargoyle width, pursed again), like some alchemist working a miracle of hate. Then he danced around the room, laying about him with a poker, creating dents and splinters in the woodwork and breaking every pane of glass in the place.

He then set fire to the desk and lay down to die.

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When the smoke became too much to bear, he got up and doused the fire with water from the sink. Death might be a welcome end — but too much discomfort preceded it.

At that moment, and in the days that followed, he set himself to survive. The nightmares of that task refuted Darwin.

He must polish dirty apples, lick boots, take every kind of filth and violence the diseased minds of Limbo could dish out. He must be the mascot of maniacs, the whipping-boy of a collective Id, the creature around explicitly to be hurt, bullied, tormented, used; for this gave him a functional value not easily duplicated on this little world of paranoid sadists. He was the goat among the Judas wolves; he gave them something they needed, the sight of abject fear, and it bought his life from day to day, for the Limbos held everything but themselves in hate and contempt, and "everything" was so far away — except John Thorens.

He won scars, hideous memories and the continuation of life. His first serious beating was at the hands of Turk. Thorens was bedridden for three days, with hot pads on his abdomen and groin. Turk came around on the second night for some more of the same, took one look at Thorens' haunted eyes and went away muttering something about "necrophilia" — possibly the only five-syllable word the man knew; certainly in a predictable category.

His value as patsy begot Thorens champions: it was circulated that the man who killed him would be buried all around him as a garnish; and when one day a visitor from the nearby town of Freedom had thumbed his knife and advanced to whittle Thorens for the sin of stumbling against him, another knife, flipped expertly from sheath and halfway across the street into the back of the visitor's skull, had ended that. Two days later Thorens' rescuer got whopped at blackjack and worked off his annoyance by beating Thorens into a state of gibbering half-consciousness and throwing him at the mirror behind Potts' bar. Potts, in order to save the mirror, had hastily interposed his own body. Staggered by the impact, he had missed his first knife-throw at the offender. Not so the second. Then, upset by the entire episode, he had himself completed the job on Thorens and thrown him out.

OF COURSE, not all the Limbos were as totally vicious and depraved as Turk, Potts, and their crowd.

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Some were scarcely more than brutally playful. Others were as often as not oblivious of Thorens' existence, unless he made the mistake of attracting their attention. In all, however, was the corrupt vein of cruelty, whether manifested by sins of commission or omission . . . a cruelty born of not-caring, of detachment from things human, of ruthless self-interest. They had stepped out of society and out of history to live their lives as a whim. They could not be predicted.

So he couldn't count on protectors — except on an unpredictable basis, where a wrong guess might be fatal. Nor, failing human bulwarks, could he find shelter, haven, sanctuary — for there was no place on Limbo to hide.

On a few occasions, Thorens thought he had made friends — especially among the newcomers who arrived in batches now and then. There was even camaraderie. But always came betrayal. At last he grew to understand the contamination factor in this world where the floodgates were down and the newcomer quickly inundated. He developed an instinct that told him that now was the time to step out of the path of one he had befriended, for another superego had gasped its last and another brawling madman been born.

Unlike his predecessor, Thorens had no devout religious convictions to sustain him (or, for that matter, to cause his immediate downfall).

No protectors. No physical escape. No mystical source of courage and strength . . .

Naturally, then, Thorens had a project underway, as sensitive men will have when forced to exist under conditions which they cannot bear but must. To it he devoted the predictable amount of fanatic concentration. Its title was *LIMBO — Hell in Space*, and some forty thousand words were completed in first draft. Thorens had a knack for literary expression. But the book, growing as it did from daily torment and indignation, was jumbled, incoherent, chaotic. Into it he poured his boundless hatred, his piteous cries, his curses and protests all unuttered in actuality. In it were masses of words bundled into sobs; scalding portraits of his individual tormentors, and descriptions in vivid and anatomical detail of the punishments he wished he could visit upon them; lengthy, sprawling psychosocial analyses that would not have satisfied a more objective eye. The book was a monstrous panorama which, drawn in the convulsive strokes of his agony, had even a certain power. With words as weapons, he slew his

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tormentors; and without that outlet he might have gone mad.

Or perhaps the book was itself his madness, externalized.

So far — so far — from home. . . .

Three hundred million miles.

Turk shifted heavily (the hippopotamus responding to what?) His eyes turned to stare back into the room, seeking Thorens. "Patrol ship," he said sourly, disappointedly. "Tough guys." (That was what.) Then he kept his eyes on Thorens. Savoring melodrama, he grinned a slow grin.

At the bar, Potts cackled like a hen and said, "Hooray — those babies drink hard!"

Thorens got up stiffly and went toward the rear of the bar. He heard Turk wheeze behind him, the scrape of the fat man's boots on the floor — trying to get up — and he walked faster. He reached the washroom and locked the door behind him, leaned against the wall. He stood that way for a few minutes, face wet, throat tight, stomach churning. Still nailed to the wall was the pageless binding of his copy of *Paradise Lost*. He put his hand on it. Milton had lived and written (and had written *Regained!)* — there was an Earth, somewhere — there was a human spirit . . .

Finally the nausea passed.

Turk, chuckling, had gone away too.

THEY trooped in, the tough young men in Patrol uniforms. As usual, they sat around the front end of the bar, laughing, raising a hubbub, ignoring the scowling Limbos. One reached up to the shelf and turned off the *maestro* . . .

— feel like a motherless —

. . . and turned on the trivision. Hot, atonal music. A painted girl (gold, orange and green) dancing against a swirling, color-organ background. Whistles, laughter. Hands uplifted in the "I've-been-in-Space-and-I-need-it!" sign.

Back at his table, Thorens' head bowed to his hands. Then it proceeded to the table — a terrible bereavment welling up to add mass to his present misery. He remembered a voice singing *London Bridge is Falling Down,* remembered clearly from childhood (or thought he did) warmth and loving caresses; a smile from close above, and sweet breath —

Strong, soft arms that now were husks, and the only truly understanding eyes in the Universe were closed and desiccated, and the last sound-wave of her voice had dispersed to become only air molecules, and the in-

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credible goddess of every man vanishes, vanishes, save from her castle — the tortured subconscious of her son. In compound gear, where Oedipus engages Death, Thorens had wandered that night a month ago, the spacegram from his father crumpled in his hand, and for some reason — perhaps it was his eyes — the Limbos had let him alone. The next night he had been beaten twice, and started his book.

"Thorens!"

Thorens flinched and slowly raised his head. One of the Patrolmen had spotted him and got up — now came around the end of the bar lithely, one hand braced on the shoulder of a comrade. Thorens watched him come, struggling up out of his welter of tangled, miserable introspection.

"Hi!" The Patrolman dropped into a seat and in the same motion poured a little of his drink into Thorens' empty glass. "Still alive, I see, eh?"

"Still alive, Lieutenant."

"Not as bad as you thought at first, eh?"

"Not as bad."

LIEUTENANT Mike Burman was blocky and space-burned; head well shaped, mouth wide, eyes just a little too closely set; about 26; less than a year out of the Space Academy at Gagaringrad. This was his sixth stop-over on Limbo. He had met Thorens on his first, four months ago, and each time since. In him seemed to stir a vague sympathy for the little man—as vague and unformed as his comprehension of Thorens' true predicament on Limbo. Over any comprehension rode a Boston-bred suspicion that all such phenomena as Limbo and its gutterbums weren't quite real, or at least shouldn't be. But he admired the Helping Hand. His family contributed regularly. He supposed things *were* fairly disordered on Limbo, poor devils. It was good to see a Hand out here, on the job. When you came right down to it, it all had rather a touch of romance. Thorens' tales of woe he chose, for the most part, to discredit. After all, there was a limit. Space, he knew, bred strange types—strong men, eccentric men — men possessed of some personal Hell. Like Thorens.

Looking at the young idiot, Thorens managed a smile. "It's good to see you. How's Earth?"

"Oh . . . still there, the last time I looked!" Burman laughed at his wit, and Thorens moved his lips to join in.

"Y'know, I've asked around a little," Burman said. "None of the Patrolmen stationed here has ever seen anyone lay a finger on you!" He grinned, his expression

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somehow sly. "You were putting it on a little, eh?"

"Maybe a little." You fool! . . . of course they leave me alone when the Patrol is around!

Now Mike Burman frowned suddenly, exaggeratedly, as if he had just remembered something. "Hey, that reminds me, Thorens. I've got a message for you. You're supposed to go in and see the Lieutenant-Com."

A burst of laughter from the bar had drowned out his last few words. Thorens was blinking in that direction. Burman repeated the message: "You're supposed to go in and see the 2nd C. O."

THORENS looked at him. "What for?"

"I don't know," Mike Burman lied. You're shipping out, Thorens. Earthside. I know, because you're going back on my ship. That's what the Old Man wants to tell you.

"You didn't get the message at your office," Burman explained, "so they told me to look you up."

"I haven't been there for three days." In the dark universe behind John Thorens' eyes there appeared the tiniest, most hesitant flicker of animation — the stirring of some minute, slumbering particle; a particle that might become a flame . . . a light . . . a sun. The creation of suns from empty nothingness is mysterious; the creation of Hope is mystery itself. But the stirring primal particle in John Thorens' Universe darkened to nothingness again.

Your mother's last wish, Thorens — and then your father got to some softie in the HH. So back you go, for the atomicremation. Frankly, though, don't you think you're kind of running out on the job?

Thorens had lived with the "message" for about ten seconds now. The particle of sub-Hope dared to stir again, since no inimical forces had put in an appearance.

"Why should the Old Man want to see me?" he whispered.

"Your packet," Burman said. "I think that's what it's about." He winked at himself in the mirror. Tomorrow, after all, was soon enough for Thorens to know the facts. Besides, Burman had no authorization to pass the real dope along. The packet — clever.

"My packet?" Thorens said, still whispering. "My packet? What about it?"

(The packet was the monthly HH mailing to all its Hands, containing: Instructions (if any); pay-check; report forms; requisition-slips for needed supplies (if any); and the monthly newsbulletin, BROTHERLY LOVE.)

"It came open, during shipping," Burman said casually. "You're supposed to check it

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over, see that it's all in order. Regulations."

No icy, rushing, negative forces were required to extinguish the particle. It simply went out. "That's funny," Thorens whispered.

Burman milked it. "Speaking of Earth, it's spring now in New York."

"Lord," said Thorens, after a moment, in a starving voice, "the heat'll be coming along. . . ."

"Bad winter. Twenty-eight inches of snow one time. You couldn't drive a bug."

"I know. You told me last time. How are the new model bugs?"

"Chrysler's finally bringing out that one-wheel job."

Thorens shook his head. "I wouldn't trust it. You hit two hundred and the gyro goes out and you start turning thirty-foot cartwheels."

Tears gleamed on his cheeks. Burman shot him a look and pursed his lips, feeling a slight twinge.

THE trivision began to chant out a spaceman's song, describing the average spacehand's affection for his superior officers. The Patrolmen at the bar set up a roar, and one shouted to Mike Burman, "Hey, loot! This one's dedicated to you!" Then they took up the song:

"Just tell him for me, he's an essuvabee,
"And his mother's a Martian monstros-s-sity!"

Thorens blinked—(*Sometimes I feel . . .*)—and shifted in his seat, feeling the comfortable if temporary security provided by the presence of these men.

A woman came in. Tall, hard-faced, green-eyed, with clipped dark hair. She wore two knives, handles forward. Her leather breastplates were neither new nor badly scarred, which meant her steel was fast. Eyes of Limbos brushed her up and down appreciatively, but no one made the sign. The tough ones were unpredictable. She got her drink, moved to a corner table.

At the bar a big young Patrolman new to Limbo, singing, had not taken his eyes off her ample curves. His chest had swelled. Now her eyes caught his gaze and became icy green flames. He looked away hastily, remembering a briefing.

Thoren's lips curled in loathing, hatred, contempt. The women of Limbo were even more repellent than the men. Especially the swaggering, strutting, leather-garbed alleycats of Damesville, with their cruel eyes and filthy mouths. That *they* should continue to live —

Mike Burman had been smil-

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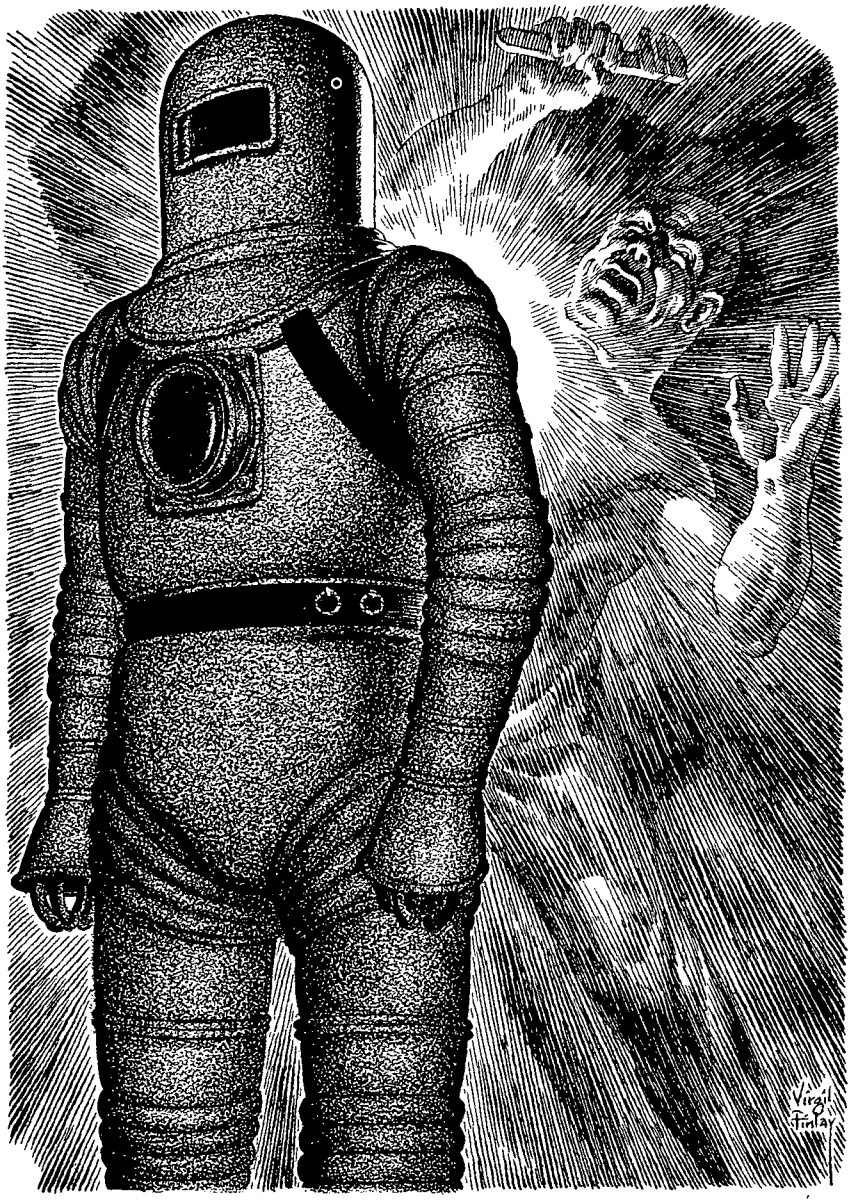

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ing at the song, and at his men's loud endorsement of the fact that he was a essuvabee. "Speaking of S.O.B.'s," he grinned, "two real beauts are heading Earthside!" He almost added: "— with you, on my ship —" but fortunately he caught himself.

Thorens still glared at the woman, head down, eyes up. "Paroles?" he asked, not caring.

"In one case," Burman nodded. "For him." He pointed to Potts. "The other one's going back so the shrinkers can have another look. Him." He pointed to Turk.

IT TOOK a moment to sink in — a process of appalled disbelief to furious rejection of fact to bitter acceptance that shriveled to numbness. Music blared from the trivision as the song ended. Applause, more laughter. Thorens' face sagged off the front of his skull — his voice seemed wrenched out of him — "*Those two?*"

Burman stared at Thorens, not realizing (*hate*) what he had done. The trivision started (*hate*) a new wham 'n bam song hit, and the two singers (*hate*) began to fake their blows at each other.

It canceled John Thorens' mind, shuddered down through his body to explode at his extremities. It was stronger than any other emotion he had ever known. He contracted in his chair, elbows and knees doubling. Half-huddled thus, he trembled violently. *Hate Turk, hate Potts, bite lips, taste blood, fight, hate, hate* —

Those two. Flying up out of Hell to the distant blue-green world that was Heaven. *No — no!*

Mike Burman searched the distorted features of the little, sandy-bearded man who sat opposite him. He talked, feeling uncomfortably that there seemed little else to do: "Potts — lack of conclusive evidence of premeditation. Changed to second degree, sentence commuted to what he's already served. And Turk — recalled for psychiatric—"

He said a few more words, hesitantly, barely audible under the general din, while he studied Thorens' face.

Thorens seemed to catch fire. He thrust up out of his chair, overturning it. "*Damn you!*" he gasped. "*No . . .* not *them . . .* get me a transfer . . . get *me* a parole . . . *me . . . me — me —*" His eyes bulged. He leaned far over the table, his breath causing strands of Burman's hair to move, and shrieked at the top of his lungs: "Take me to Earth — not them!"

An interested silence fell over the bar, save for the trivision's wham 'n bam. Hands of Limbos

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went to knives, anticipating action. The Patrolmen instantly, but casually, grouped to leave, as protocol required.

But this was an unusual situation. Little Thorens, the Hand, was blowing his stack at the Patrol loot. Expressions became uncertain.

Mike Burman was rearing back in dismay, as if Thorens' cry had boosted him under the chin. "What? *What?* Why, I don't — Thorens, I really—"

Thorens swayed there, shoulders forward, hands working. His half-closed, watering eyes caught a flicker of movement outside the window — and even in his extreme agony he could chill at a strange sight.

Two giants.

Then details registered and became not strange. He heard, from far away, someone at the door say, "Somebody bringing a spacesuit in here."

EYES, turning from the tableau at the table to the door, saw a gigantic spacesuit float from the darkness. Gleaming, shining, towering, it resembled a deep-sea diving suit with its great windowed helmet, its claw gloves, its massive body three feet across, seven and one half feet high. A big man carried the suit, his right arm about its waist, his left arm grasping its left arm.

In this manner, holding it erect like a dancing-partner or more like someone getting a gentle bum's-rush, he walked the suit across the fog-shrouded concrete roadway, up onto the curb toward Potts' bar. With one hand he opened the door. With the other he easily jumped the suit across the sill. The suit weighed three hundred pounds.

The voice said, "Fixin' job, Turk." Turk nodded, his small admiring eyes fastened on the huge figures in the door.

Handsome, golden-haired, the newcomer; six feet nine inches tall and grinning. He stood there, balancing his specially built suit with its sprung demand-valve. "Where fat man?" he rumbled.

Thorens was stumbling toward the door. Mike Burman looked after him, eyes bright with bewilderment, pique, vague sympathy. Then, whistling tunelessly between his teeth, he started back for his fellows at the end of the bar. He called to 1st Engineer's Mate "Goldy" Svenson to join them as soon as he got rid of the suit.

Thorens scooped a bottle off the bar, evading its owner's indignant grab, and in perfect silence threw it at the head of the Damesville woman with all his might. It smashed against the wall by her head — or rather where her head had been, for she

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was on her feet, screaming and pulling her steel. Glass from the bottle still skittered and tinkled as she drew back full-arm for the throw that would skewer Thorens. A roar and a whoop had gone up from the bar. Men doorwise from the woman scattered from the line of fire. Men behind her watched, heads turned and wary.

Mike Burman shouted an order in single-syllable Patrol Code. Three Patrolmen sprang to positions between Thorens and the woman. They didn't draw their guns — they didn't have to. The woman's throw was already started. She couldn't hold it back; so she clung to the blade in a balk-throw and sank its point two inches into the floor at her feet. Instantly she snatched her second knife from sheath, on guard against the Limbo men. Glaring around, she cursed the grinning Patrolmen.

"Where fat man?" rumbled "Goldy" Svenson again. He had not moved.

Turk said, "Right here, cop." As he began to wheeze, preparatory to getting up, his eyes clamped on the giants at the door, a third figure, small and furtive, dodged around them into the night.

Watching Thorens go, Mike Burman thought: "I almost wish I'd told him. . . ."

IV

ACROSS the roadway from Potts' bar was a steep rocky slope that led down to darkened fields some thirty feet below, and the flat gray expanse of the Spaceport beyond. A barbed-wire fence ran along the edge of the road, to discourage drunken Limbos from brawling through the fields and trampling the crops. Thorens bent down the top strand, tearing his forefinger to the bone.

He stepped over. He took two blind steps, put a foot over the incline to encounter nothingness and spilled, rolled, flopped to the bottom. He lay on his back in the rain-ditch, face barely out of the filthy water, and cried.

The seconds and minutes of his grief wore on. An occasional star winked down through the chill, slow-moving fog.

Thorens squinted up at each and sobbed the louder, wishing that mysterious forces could mesh to make him a vanished man, could transport him to each speck's vast flaming surface, push or pull him into the nuclear inferno of its interior, plunge him into the sweet methane or ammonia or formaldehyde of the atmosphere of its planets, if it had planets, or send him hurtling onto the bitter, airless surface of any of its planets' satellites — or

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rush him away to a point midway between the two suns that were Mira (which he recognized), there to hang suspended as a mote that once had lived but now took its motion, its vectors, its orbit, its course through Infinity and Eternity, as the product of forces that were not consciously cruel.

Footsteps above Thorens choked a sob into utter silence. His hands, under water, clenched at mud. His legs tightened in terror, and developed a cramp.

"Hear it?" a voice said, from the road.

"Yeah."

"See anything?"

"Too dark. Sounded like crying."

"Let's look."

Thorens heard the wire creak as it was stretched down, and, clearly, the whisper of a long knife from sheath. He gulped in air and sank his face under the water — it murmured in his eardrums, transmitting his own tiny movements.

When his lungs could stand it no longer, he bobbed his head up and gasped through his burning throat, "Kill me! Why am I hiding? Please, oh, my God, please, *kill me!*"

He lay with wide eyes staring up; he saw Mira appear, then disappear again into the fog. He saw the suns, the worlds, the moons, the vacuums and infernos that filled the reaches of space, but could not notice him nor help him to die. He waited, with a mixture of mud and gastric juices in his mouth, for the fist, the boot, the knife.

The fog around him was empty. Footsteps faded far down the road. They had not been curious enough to come down — or perhaps they had thought it was a muggers' trap.

If the latter, Thorens thought frantically, they might be going to get some friends together, so they could come back and fight. His arms and legs grasped, pumped, scrambled, flailed.

He crawled up the slope. He did not want to die.

TURK'S Repair Shop was located in a shack behind Potts'_ bar. In it were a tool bench, some metal-working machinery and a cot on which Turk slept when he was too tired or too drunk to make his way home.

While the Patrol naturally maintained its own repair facilities for spacesuits and all other equipment, still Turk was expert and dependable. And he would work at night, when the Patrol machine-shops were closed. Also, when Patrolmen patronized Turk, they received a bonus in addition to good workmanship, i. e., tips on what bars were or

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were not watering their liquor that week, and where the cleanest girls were to be found, and at what gambling-dive the tables were running against the house. So Turk prospered. And no Limbo objected. What Turk did was, in the long run, good public relations.

Now, in the light of overhead 'tomics, Turk labored to repair "Goldy" Svenson's spacesuit — but he was thinking about John Thorens.

What a funny little jerk the Hand was! Sure, he got clobbered, day after day. But he asked for it! The crummy little milksop *asked* for it. He never talked to you straight from the shoulder. He hid in the back of his skull and played angles. He looked at you with rubbery little face, and you knew he expected you to murder him, so you got mad and did it. All he cared about was *out*. He ran around Limbo like a turpentined pup, squawking to lifetermers about *out*. It was a drag. He'd make it off Limbo sooner or later, and good riddance. Right now he was just exactly where everybody else was, except for one thing — he looked at you that way and you had to cream him.

Then Turk started thinking about "Goldy" Svenson, all six feet nine inches of him, and that was Turk's mistake.

He undid eight screws and lifted a curved plate away from the back of the suit . . .

Thorens turned the last corner. His office was burning.

"We read your book," a voice said from the shadows. "It started a good fire."

That's Joe Moore's voice, Thorens thought. Joe. Joe. I bought you a drink on your second night on Limbo. and you said you were sorry for me. You said you were innocent of any crime. You hated the place as I do. What made you run with the pack?

"When you start yelling at the law," another voice said, "that's bad. Creates a scene. Draws attention. You need a lesson."

"But we won't kill you, you little bastard," another voice said. "You're too much fun to have around."

Thorens screamed, and for the second time since his arrival on Limbo dared to run. This time, he thought agonizedly, he must get away.

But that was before a belt-buckle, aimed low, lashed out of the darkness *ahead* of him.

THEY gathered around in Turk's Repair Shop and looked down at the large, sprawled, melted-looking, half-boiled, red and gray thing with staring,

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milky eyes that had been Turk.

Here and there white showed, where flesh had sagged in blobs away from bone. The cracked skin glistened with oil, cooked up out of Turk's enormous supply of fat.

"Christ!" said one. "Did you hear him *scream!*"

The spacesuit stood where it had killed Turk. But now it was harmless. Potts' frantic call to the Spaceport had brought a Radiation Squad on the double. (Wild radiation was one of the very few things on Limbo that the Patrol would tend to, mainly to insure the safety of their own men stationed there.) An officer in protective clothing had gone into Turk's shack and closed the small plate that covered the spacesuit's atomic-power-pack. The radiation, though it had killed Turk quickly and then cooked him through prolonged exposure, counted its half-life in mere minutes; so now the room was safe to enter.

The officer was removing the radiation suit. His companion said casually, "You know how it happened, anybody?"

Heads shook *no*. One man snickered and the officer looked at him: "What's funny?"

"What isn't?"

"Do you know what happened?" (Ordinarily, the officers wouldn't have given a damn what happened; but since Patrol equipment was involved, they had to shape up a report.)

The man shrugged. "Those plates are close together . . . the one on the power, and the one to the oxy-system. I guess he got careless."

"What's funny?"

"I owed him eighty bucks on blackjack," the man smirked. "He was gravving me for it. I was going to kill him myself, and he saves me the trouble!"

The officers looked around, mouths curled in wry distaste. The Limbos grinned back, disliking them, wishing they could kill them — but no one could be safer anywhere than a Patrolman on Limbo.

Without another word the Patrolmen left. Over the motor-noise of their bug fading down the street, Potts cursed as he looked at the mess on the floor: "How do I clean *this* up?"

"Bring in stray dogs," one man said.

Potts nodded appreciatively. "That's sharp." He kicked the mess in the ribs and went over to the spacesuit. "Somebody help me get this damn thing outa the way!"

Two men joined him, and they inched the heavy bulger toward a wall.

Lieutenant Mike Burman was among the watchers, with some

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of his buddies. He stared down at the mess, thinking, He never even knew he was going back.

Potts wrestled with the spacesuit. Another step, and his foot slipped on the wrench that Turk had dropped in dying, and he lurched sideways. He made the error of hanging onto the suit, trying to right himself, and his added weight overbalanced it and took it out of the hands of the other two helping him. For a second they made an effort to hold it back, but the mass was great and slippery, and so they let go, with the suggestion of shrugs.

In mid-air, falling, Potts began to scream.

The suit followed him down in the same arc, not very quickly, it seemed, stiffly, like an inexperienced lover bending to the loved. The heavy angle of a shoulder-plate shoved into Potts' mouth as the back of his head hit the floor, and his scream cut off with a crackling of bone.

They watched his hands twitch until finally every part of him was dead. The big young Patrolman who had looked at the woman was in a corner, holding his stomach with folded arms and swallowing excess saliva. Mike Burman was standing in front of him, thoughtful-eyed, as if not wanting the Limbos to see that Patrolmen had nerves.

He had another reason for being thoughtful. Tonight Mike Burman was very near to believing in Fate.

The Limbos looked at the spacesuit. One whistled.

THORENS takes a step, and somewhere in the cauldron of pain, humiliation and fear that is melting down his mind and nervous system to basic animal responses, float fragmentary memories of this last half-hour he has endured. . . .

Another step.

Let him go. A shape moves aside. *He's had it.*

One more.

A blow — somewhere in his back.

Lay off the kidneys. We don't want to kill him.

Please kill me.

Poker game at Charlie's . . . how about it?

Thought you were looking for Cat Redfield, to slice him.

Ah . . . I don't feel like it. Come on — let's go.

A nudge in Thorens' back, and he falls down. Drooling blood he gets up, takes a step.

Voices fade.

Another step. . . .

Walk through darkness, walk through pain, walk through fog past shadows that are things half-known, down winding, wet-gleaming streets, past lighted doors

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and windows, past jags and whirls and bursts of rainbow neon, under humming power lines, past toy factories whose tall smokestacks flicker at the tops with red-shot smoke (and through the walls a Teddy-bear grins; a shiny fire-engine blinks its headlight eyes and sirens a hello; an electric monorail whirs on its figure-8 to nowhere; a sleek rocketship charts a course for a far-off, better world; a hundred, harmless, joyous games play noisily all by themselves; a Chem-Craft Set percolates a panacea, while an Erector Set places the last shining girder in its bridge to Elsewhere; a Limbo night-watchman sprawls, bottle in hand, surrounded by the Answer apparent to any boy — and through the walls a wistful touch, a loving recollection)—and now along a fence, over dirt, across sand, past stunted plants that never have seen day, past looming dark hills and silent mineral diggings with gaunt machinery like poised skeletons, past a silver Spaceport that is a door to Heaven that has *no* key, past men who stare and squint through foggy darkness and nudge each other and laugh, past sight and sound of men talking, laughing, breathing, and their hearts pumping blood that rushes noisily through tiny tubes surrounded by muscles that whisper against one another as they gather to give pain . . . walk past life, or around it, or over it, or any way but through it, to some other place.

Walk crying, walk bleeding, walk hurting, through and then beyond the veil of thoughts that govern thought to keep the Universe real.

AN ALLEY. Muddy water cool around ankles. An alley, somewhere off behind the world, containing its refuse, its secrets, its littered history. An alley, closer to the past than a street . . . on the dark other side of Now. A building gray-crouched in the fog — a dirt-encrusted back window — a searching . . .

Her.

Thorens stopped, swayed, stared.

Her.

Giant shape waiting against the wall inside, outlined in reflected flickerings from the Spaceport across the way as a ship prepared to take devils to Heaven; and now it could go, and nobody cared, for an Angel had walked with love across the stars, and the Universe had heard, and now a giant shape, strong, exuding warmth, concern, a solidity —

Thorens' mind squirted out through the sutures of his skull.

Smash of window-glass — cut

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hands — Has darling hurt himself? Let's see! Toward the huge, longed-for shape, and that smile like the birth of a Sun: Did you think Mummy was lost?

Thorens was murmuring. His fists hurt from clenching. He lay down beside her. His head rested on the wide shoulder, his nose in the socket of the great neck. Outside, the rocket blared, took off, yellow flash, up fast, faster, dying, echoes.

Mom, a big noise!

It's all right, dear.

Rubbing his cheek against the shining right arm, his left arm behind her back — close to the cool, sure strength.

Close doors, slam hatches, lock windows, pull shades, dig moats, build dikes, fasten gates — eyelids shut and everything's outside. Pictures through a killiedescape — white mountains with pink-candy tops — checkerboard fields and green, fragrant trees and little animals that stare with bright friendly eyes. Childhood was a wonderful place, even with the dead bird — so fun, so safe, so hurt to remember. Blanket tucked in warm, and the Sandman is coming; the sky rips down the middle, falls shining, and the world is sliced into (*Happy*) birthday (*to you!*) cake with roast turkey; the song-voice rises, and London Bridge topples finally and forever across the *Thems*, amid waves and enveloping splashes of want-her —

Warm. Little legs drawn up against round little belly. Finger poked into limp little mouth. *He's the living image of his mother. Oh, look. He's smiling!*

"WHAT THE hell is *that* racket?"

"It's coming from over here. The suit . . ."

"You're crazy."

"*Listen.*"

"Open the belly-clamps."

"*You* open them."

"They already are." (Grunt.) "What the hell? Something's holding it shut from inside." (Louder grunt.)

"What's *he* doing in there?"

"Look at his *face!*"

"Hey — come on out, stupid! Come *outa* there — " (Pause.) "He *bit* me!" (Slug!) "Somebody call the Patrol . . ." (Slap!)

"Wa-aa-a-a-aa-a-a-a!"

Two Patrol bugs through the dawn-light on a howling Code Three. Laughing, chatting Limbos evicted for the steel Caesarean. A half-hour battle — sick tenderness, and flaring tempers too.

Lieutenant Mike Burman never in his life stopped dreaming of the wailing, flailing, sweating, oversized foetus born of Swenson's spacesuit.

— JEROME BIXBY

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